

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER 1, 1869.

ROLAND YORKE.

A SEQUEL TO "THE CHANNINGS."

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE," "GEORGE CANTERBURY'S WILL," &c.

CHAPTER XLI.

A TELEGRAM FOR ROLAND YORKE.

LOUNGING quite back in the old elbow horsehair chair, his feet stretched out on the hob on either side of the fire, which elegant position he had possibly learnt at Port Natal, sat Mr. Roland Yorke. He had just come home to his five o'clock tea, and took the occasion to indulge in sundry reminiscences while waiting for it to be brought to him. Christmas had passed these two or three days now, the brief holiday was over, and working days were going on again.

Roland's mood was a subdued one. All things seemed to be, more or less, tinted with gloom. Hamish Channing was dying; a summons had been sent for his friends: the last hour could not now be very far off: and Roland felt it deeply. The ill worked by his brother Gerald seemed never to go out of his mind for a moment, sleeping or waking. Vexation of a different kind was also his. Day after day in his sanguine temperament he had looked for a letter from Sir Vincent Yorke, appointing him to the post of bailiff; and no such letter came. Roland, who had heard nothing of the slight accident caused by Gerald (you may be very sure Gerald would not be the one to speak of it), supposed the baronet was in Paris with Miss Trehern. A third source of discomfort lay in the office. Bede Greatorex, whose health since the past few days had signally failed, avowed himself at last unequal to work, and an extra amount of it fell upon his clerks. Roland thought it a sin and a shame that before Christmas Day had well turned, he should have, as he phrased it, "to stick to it like any dray-horse." A rumour had arisen in the office that Bede Greatorex was going away with his wife for change and restoration, and that Mr. Brown was to be head of the department in Bede's place. Roland did not regard the prospect with

pleasure; Mr. Brown being a regular martinet in regard to keeping the clerks to their duty.

The grievance that lay uppermost on his mind this evening was the silence of Sir Vincent. For Hamish he had grieved until it seemed that he could grieve no longer; the rumoured change in the office might never be carried out; but on the score of Sir Vincent's neglect there was no palliation.

"I'd not treat *him* so," grumbled Roland, his complaint striving to find relief in words. "Even if the place was gone when I applied, or he thought I'd not suit, he might write to me. It's all very fine for him, kicking up his heels in Paris, and dining magnificently in the restaurants off partridges and champagne, and forgetting a fellow as he forgets me; but if his whole hopes in life lay on the die, he'd remember, I know. If I knew his address over there, I'd drop him another letter, and tell him to put me out of suspense. For all the answer that has come to me, one might think he had never had that first letter of mine. He has had it though, and it's a regular shame of him not to acknowledge it, when my heart was set on being able to carry Hamish the cheering news before he died, that Annabel was provided for. If Dick would only give us a pretty little cottage down yonder and a couple of hundreds a year! It wouldn't be much for Dick to give, and I'd serve him bravely day and night. I declare I go into Hamish's room as sheep-faced as a calf, with the shame of having no news to tell. Annabel says—— Oh, it's you, Miss Rye, is it? Precious cold to-night!"

Miss Rye had come in with the small tea-tray: the servant was busy. She wore a knot of blue ribbon in her hair, and looked otherwise bright. Since a private interview held with Mr. Butterby and George Winter, when they returned to release her from custody, she had appeared like a different woman. Her whole aspect was changed: the sad despairing fear on her face had given place to a look of rest and hope. Roland had taken occasion to give Mr. Butterby a taste of what that gentleman called "sauce" as to his incurable propensity for apprehending the wrong person, and was advised in return to mind his own business; while Mrs. Jones had been existing in a chronic state of tartness, for she could not come to the bottom of things, and Alletha betrayed anything but a readiness to enlighten her.

"What's for tea?" asked Roland, lazily, turning his head to get a view of the tray.

"They have boiled you an egg," replied Miss Rye. "There was nothing else in the house. Have you seen your letter, Mr. Yorke?"

"A letter!" exclaimed Roland, starting up with so much alacrity as to throw down the chair, for his hopes suddenly turned to the vainly-expected communication from Sir Vincent. "Where is it? When did it come? Good old Dick!"

It had come just as he went out after dinner, she answered, as she

took the letter—which bore a foreign post-mark—from the mantel-piece to hand to him. And eager Roland's spirits went down to zero as he tore it open; for he recognized the writing to be, not Dick Yorke's, but Lord Carrick's.

"Oh, come though, it's rather good," said he, running his eyes down the plain and sprawling hand, very much like his own. "Carrick has come out of his troubles: at least enough of them to show himself by daylight again in the old country: he will be over in London directly. I say, Miss Rye, I'll bring him here, and introduce him to you and Mrs. J."

And Miss Rye laughed as she left the room more freely than she had laughed for many a day.

"Perhaps Carrick can put me into something!" self-communed Roland, cutting off the top of his egg, and taking in a half-slice of inch-thick bread-and-butter at a bite. "I know he'll not want the will when I tell him about Annabel."

The last morsel was eaten, and Roland was on the point of demanding more, for his appetite never failed, when he heard some one come to the house and inquire for Mr. Yorke. Visions of the arrival of Lord Carrick flashed over him; he made a dash to the passage, and very nearly threw down a meek little gentleman, who was being shown into his room.

"Halloa!" said Roland, the corners of his mouth dropping with disappointment. "Is it only you?"

For the visitor was nobody but little Jenner. He had brought a communication from Mr. Greatorax, and took off his hat while he delivered it.

"You are to go back with me to the office, if you please, Mr. Yorke. Mr. Greatorax wants you."

"What have I done now?" questioned Roland, anticipative of a reprimand.

"It is not for anything of that sort, sir. I believe Sir Vincent Yorke has telegraphed for you to go down to him at Sunny Mead. The despatch said you were to lose no time."

Whether Roland leaped highest or shouted loudest, the startled house could not have decided. The anticipated bailiff's place was, in his imagination, as surely his as though he had been installed in it formally. To wash his hands, brush his hair, and put on a superfine coat took but a minute before he was striding into the office, little Jenner on the run by his side, and in the presence of Mr. Greatorax.

Into which he went with a burst. The lawyer received him calmly and showed the message from Surrey. "Sir Vincent Yorke to Mr. Greatorax. Send Roland Yorke down to me by first train. Lose no time."

"Good old Dick!" repeated Roland, in the fulness of his heart.

"I thought he'd remember me; and there was I, reproaching him like an ungrateful tom-cat! It is to appoint me to the bailiff's place, Mr. Greatorex."

"Well, it may be," mused Mr. Greatorex. "But I had fancied the post was filled up."

"Not it, sir. Long live Dick! When did he come back from Paris?"

"I know nothing about Sir Vincent's recent movements, Mr. Yorke. You had better be getting to the Waterloo Station. Have you money for the journey?"

"I've got about sevenpence-halfpenny, sir."

Mr. Greatorex took a half-sovereign from his desk, and ten shillings in silver. "I don't know how often the trains run," he observed; "but if you go at once to the station, you will be all right for the first that starts."

Not to the station, let it start as soon as it would, without first seeing Annabel, and telling her of his good fortune. Away up the stairs went Roland, in search of her, leaping over some boxes that stood packed in the hall; and there he encountered Mr. Bede Greatorex. It was four whole days since Roland had met him, and he thought he had never seen a face so changed in the short space of time. Annabel was not at home, Bede said; she had gone to Mr. Channing's.

"You don't look well, sir."

"Not very, I believe. I am about to try what a month or two's absence will do for me."

"And leave us to old Brown?—that *will* be a nice go!" exclaimed Roland, in blank dismay. "But I may not have to stay," he added, more brightly, as recollection returned to him. "Vincent Yorke has telegraphed for me, sir, and I and Mr. Greatorex think that he is about to appoint me his bailiff."

A smile crossed the haggard face of Bede. "I wish you success in it," he kindly said.

"Thank you, sir. And I'm sure I wish you and Mrs. Greatorex heaps of pleasure, and I heartily hope you'll come home strong. Oh! and Mr. Bede, Carrick's coming back."

Bede nodded in answer. Greatorex and Greatorex knew more of the matter than Roland, since it was they who had intimated to the peer that the coast was now sufficiently clear for him.

Roland leaped into a cab, and was taken to Mr. Channing's. He waited in the empty dining-room; and when Annabel came to him, told her hurriedly of what had happened. The cab was waiting at the door, Roland was eager, and her pale cheeks grew rosy with blushes as he talked and held her hands.

"It can't be for anything else, you know, Annabel. He is going to instal me off-hand for certain, or else he would have written and not

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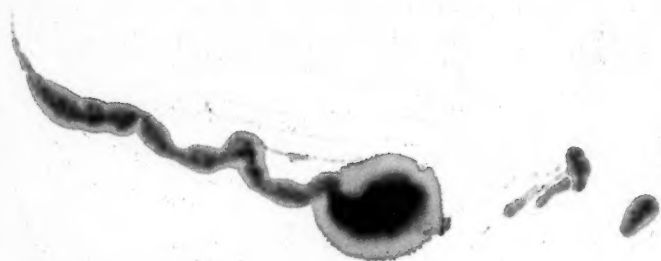
The Argosy.]



E. EVANS, sc.

Hamish Channing's Farewell.

T. GRAY, del.



telegraphed : perhaps the new bailiff (if he did appoint one) has turned out to be no good. There'll be a pretty cottage, I dare say, its walls all covered with roses and lilies, with two hundred a-year ; and we shall be as happy as the day's long. You'll not mind trying it, will you ?"

"No," Annabel whispered, the cheeks deepening to crimson, she would not mind trying it. "I think—I think, Roland," she added, bending down her pretty face, "that I might have a pupil if I liked ; and be well paid for her."

"That's jolly," said Roland. "We might do, with that, if Dick only offered me one hundred. He is uncommonly close-fisted. There'd be a house free, and no end of fruit and garden-stuff ; and living in the country is very cheap."

"It is Jane Greatorex."

"Oh, law," cried Roland, his countenance falling. "She is a regular little toad, Annabel. I'd not like you to be bothered with her."

"She would be always good with me. Mr. and Mrs. Bede are going away, and Mr. Greatorex does not want us there any longer. He said a few words to me to-day about my returning home to mamma at Helstonleigh and taking Jane with me : that is, if mamma has no objection. He said he would like Jane to be with me better than with any one ; and he'd make it worth my while in point of salary."

"Then, Annabel, if you don't object to the young monkey, that's settled, and I shall look upon it that we are as good as married. What a turn in fortune's wheel ! Won't I serve Dick with my best blood and marrow ! I'll work for him till my arms drop. I say ! couldn't I just see Hamish ? I'd like to tell him."

He ran softly up the stairs as he spoke. Hamish was in bed ; and just now alone, save for Nelly, who had rolled herself up on the counterpane like a ball, her cheek close to his. Roland whispered all the items of good news exultantly : it never occurred to him to think that they might turn out to be castles in the air. A smile, partaking somewhat of the old amused character, flitted across Hamish's wasted, but still beautiful face, and sat in his blue eyes as he listened.

"You'll leave Annabel especially to me, won't you, Hamish ; and wish us both joy and happiness ?"

"I wish you both the best wishes I can wish, Roland—God's blessing," was the low, earnest answer. "His blessing through this life, and in that to come."

Roland bent his face down to Nelly's to hide its emotion, and began kissing her. His grief for Hamish Channing sometimes showed itself like any girl's.

"I have left you her guardian, Ro'and."

"Me!" exclaimed Roland, the surprise sending him and his wet eyes bolt upright.

"You and Arthur jointly. You will take care of her interests, I know."

"Oh, Hamish, how good of you! Nelly's guardian! *Won't* I take care of her! and love her, too. I'll buy her six-pen'orth of best sugared almonds every day."

Hamish smiled. "Not her personal guardian, Roland; her mother will be that. I meant as to her property."

"Never mind; it's all one. Thank you, Hamish, for your trust in me. Oh, I am proud! And mind that you are a good girl, Miss Nelly, now that I shall have the right to call you to order."

Roland did not seem quite to define the future duties in his own mind. Nelly raised her tear-stained face, and looked at him defiantly.

"I'm going away with papa."

"Not with him, my child," whispered Hamish. "You must stay here a little while. You and mamma will come later."

Nelly burst into sobs. "Heaven is better than this. I want to go there."

"We shall all get there in time, Nelly," observed Roland, in much gloom, "but I wish I could have gone now in his stead. Oh, Hamish, I do! I do indeed! Gerald's black work will never be out of my heart. And there's your book getting its crown of laurels at last, and you not living to wear them!"

The gentle face, bright with a light not of this world, was turned to Roland. "A better crown is waiting for me," he murmured. "My Lord and Master knows how thankfully I shall go to it."

A stamping outside as of an impatient cab-horse on the frosty street, reminded Roland that he was bound on a non-delayable mission. On the stairs he met Annabel, caught hold of her without ceremony, and gave her shrinking face a few farewell kisses.

"Good-bye, darling. When I come back it will be as bailiff of Sunny Mead."

Roland's delay had been just enough to cause him to miss a train, and the evening was considerably later when he was at length deposited at the small station near Sunny Mead. Looking up the road and down the road in the cold moonlight, uncertain which was his way, he found himself accosted by a man in the garb of a groom.

"I beg pardon, sir: are you Mr. Yorke?"

"Yes."

"I've got the dog-cart here, sir."

"Oh, have you?" returned Roland; "I thought Sunny Mead was close to the station."

"It's a matter of ten minutes' walk, sir; but they gave me orders to be down, and wait for every train until you came."

"How long has Sir Vincent been back from Paris?" questioned Roland, as they bowled along.

"From Paris, sir? He haven't been to it, not lately. The accident stopped his going."

"What accident?"

Ah! what accident! Roland's eyes opened to their utmost width with surprise, as he listened to the answer.

"Good heavens! And it was caused, you say, by Gerald Yorke?"

"That it was, sir."

"Why, he's my brother."

"Well, sir, accidents happen unintentional to the best of us," observed the man, striving to be polite. "Some of 'em said that the gentleman didn't show himself 'cute at handling of a gun."

"I don't believe he ever handled one in his life before," avowed impulsive Roland. "What a fool he must have been! How is Sir Vincent going on? I'm sure I hope it was no great damage."

"Sir Vincent was going on all right till to-day, sir; and as to the damage, it was not thought to be much. We hear now that it has taken a turn for the worse. They talk of erysipelas."

"Oh, that's nothing. I knew a fellow who had got erysipelas in the face at Port Natal, till it was as big as a pumpkin, but he did his work all the same," concluded Roland.

"That's it," he mentally decided, as they approached the house. "Poor Dick! confined in-doors, can't look after things himself, and is going to put me to do it."

Upon a flat bed, or couch, in the down-stairs room, where we saw him breakfasting with Gerald, lay Sir Vincent Yorke, his dog beside him. He looked well enough in the face, and held out his hand to greet Roland. Impulsively and rather explosively, that unsophisticated African traveller burst out with regrets on the score of the accident, and the more especially that it should have been caused by Gerald.

"Ay, it was a bad job," said Sir Vincent, quietly. "Sit down, Roland. Here, near to me. I am in a good bit of pain, and don't care to talk at a distance."

Roland took the chair pointed to, not a yard off Sir Vincent as he lay, and the two looked at each other. A kind of honest shame was on Roland's face: he was inwardly asking himself how much more disgrace Gerald meant to bring on him. The moderator lamp, a soft, thin, perforated paper thrown over to subdue its brightness, was on the table behind.

"I hope you'll soon be about again, Vincent."

"I hoped so, too, until this morning," was Sir Vincent's answer. "My leg was very uneasy all last night, and I sent at daybreak for the surgeon. He came, and was obliged to tell me that an unfavourable change had taken place: in fact, that dangerous symptoms had set in."

"But you can be cured?" cried Roland.

"No, not now."

"Not be cured!" exclaimed Roland, starting up with wild eyes, and hardly knowing what to understand. "Do you mean, that it will be long first?"

"I mean, that I shall never be cured at all in this world. Sit down, Roland, and listen quietly. The wound, regarded at first as a very simple one, and apparently continuing to progress well, has taken a turn for the worse, and must shortly end in death. Now, do be tranquil, old fellow, and listen. You are my heir, you know, Roland."

Roland, constrained to patience and his chair, stared, and pulled at his whiskers, and stared again.

"Your heir?"

"Certainly. My heir."

The contingency had never, in the whole course of his life, entered into the imagination of simple Roland. He sat in speechless bewilderment.

"The moment the breath goes out of this poor frail body—and the doctors tell me it will not be many more hours in it now—you will be Sir Roland Yorke. The fourth baronet, and the possessor of the Yorke estates—such as they are."

"Oh, my gracious!" uttered Roland, a vast deal more startled at the prospect than he had been at that of crying hot pies in Poplar. "Do you mean it, Vincent?"

"*Mean* it! Where are your wits gone, that you need ask? You must know as well as I do that you come next in succession."

"I never thought of it: never, once. I don't want it, Vincent, old fellow; I don't, indeed. I hope, with all my heart, you'll get well, and hold it for yourself. Oh, Dick, I hope you will!"

Roland had risen and caught the outstretched hand. As Sir Vincent heard the earnest tones, and saw the face of genuine concern shining out in all its guileless simplicity, the tears in the honest eyes, he came to the conclusion that Roland had been somewhat depreciated among them.

"Nothing can save me, Roland; the doctors have pronounced me to be past human skill, and I feel for myself that I am so. It has not been long, one day, to 'set my house in order,' has it?"

Amidst Roland's general confusion, nothing had struck him more than the change in Vincent's tone. The old, mincing affectation was utterly gone. A man cannot retain such when brought face to face with death.

"If you could but get well!" repeated poor Roland, rubbing his hot face as he got back to his chair.

"Doctors, lawyers, and parsons—I have had them all here to-day," resumed Sir Vincent. "The first man I sent for after the fiat was

pronounced was a lawyer, from the village hard-by : there might not be time, I feared, to get down old Greatorex. He made a short will for me : and it was only when I began to consider what its provisions should be, that I (so to say) remembered you as my heir and successor."

Roland sat, hopelessly listening, unable to take in too much at once.

"The entailed property lapses to you ; but there is some, personal and else, at my own disposal. With the exception of a few legacies, I have bequeathed it all to you, Roland—and you'll be poor enough ; and I've appointed you sole executor. But I think you will make a better man, as the family's head, than I might have made in the long run ; and I am truly glad that it is you to succeed, and not Gerald."

Roland gave a groan.

"I allude to his disposition, which I don't think great things of, and to his propensity for spending," continued Sir Vincent. "Gerald would have every acre of the estate mortgaged in a couple of years ; I think you will be different. Don't live beyond your means, Roland ; that's all."

"I'll try to do my very best by everybody," replied Roland. "As to living beyond my means, Annabel will see to that, and take care of me. Dick ! Dick ! it seems so wicked of me to talk coolly of it, as if I were speculating on your death. I wish you'd try and live ! I don't want the estate and the money ; I never thought of such a thing as coming into it. I rushed down here to-night, hoping you were going to make me your bailiff ; and I thought how well I'd try to serve you, and what a good fellow you were for doing it."

"Ah !" was the dying man's slight comment, as he drew himself a trifle higher in the bed. "You will be master instead of bailiff ; that's all the difference. I had just engaged a bailiff when you wrote ; and I'd advise you to keep him on, Roland, unless you really feel competent to the management yourself."

"I'll keep him on until I've learnt it ; that won't be long first. I must have something to employ my time in, Vincent."

"True : I wish I had had it. An idle man must, almost of necessity, glide into various kinds of mischief, of which debt is one."

"You need not fear debt for me, Vincent," was the earnest answer. "I have lived too long on empty pockets, and earned a crust before I ate it, to have ill ways for money or inclination to spend. Why, my best dress-suit has been in pawn this two months ; and old Greatorex had to advance me twenty shillings to bring me down here."

Something like a smile flitted over Sir Vincent's lips. He pointed to a desk that stood on a side-table.

"When I am gone, Roland, you can open that : there's a little loose cash in it. It will be enough to repay Greatorex and redeem your clothes."

"But I'd not like to take it, Vincent, thank you. I'd not, indeed."

"Why, man ! it will be yours then."

"Oh, well—I never!" cried Roland, softly, quite unable to realize his fast-approaching position.

"The danger to some people might lie in being thus suddenly raised from poverty to affluence," remarked Sir Vincent. "It has shipwrecked many a one."

"Don't fear for me, or for the estate either, Vincent. Had this happened some seven or eight years ago, when I was a lazy, conceited, ignorant young fool, nearly as stuck-up as Gerald, I can't say how it might have been. But I went to Port Natal, you know; and I gained my life's lesson there. Hamish Channing has left me guardian to Nelly. I can guess why he did it, too—that the world may see he thinks me worthy to be trusted at last. He had always the most delicately generous heart in Christendom."

"Hamish and I!" murmured Sir Vincent, in self-communing, "on the wing nearly together."

Yes, it was so. And Roland, with all his lamentation, could not alter the fiat.

"What was the lesson you learnt at Port Natal?"

"Not to be a reckless spendthrift; not to be idle and useless. Vincent," added Roland, bending his face forward in its strange earnestness, and dropping his voice till it was scarcely louder than a whisper. "I learnt in Port Natal that there was another world to live for after this: I learnt that our time was not our own to waste in sin, but God's time, given us to use for the best. A chum of mine out there, named Bartle, was struck down by an accident; the doctor said he'd not live the day out—and he didn't. It was a caution to hear his moans and groans, Vincent. He had not been very bad, as far as I knew, in the ways that the world calls bad; he had only been careless and idle, and wasted his days, and never thought of what was to come after. I wish everybody that's the same had seen him die, Vincent, and heard his dreadful cries for mercy. If ever I forget to remember it, I think God would forget me. I saw many such sudden deaths, and plenty of remorse with them, but none as trying as his. It taught me a lesson: brought me to thought, you know. Don't you fear for me, Vincent; it will be all right, I hope: and if I could ever be so foolhardy as to look at a step on the backward route, Annabel would not let me take it."

Roland had spoken in characteristic oblivion that the case, as to the sudden striking down, bore so entire an analogy to the one before him. Sir Vincent recalled it to him.

"Yes. Just as it is with me, Roland."

"Oh—but—you've got time yet, you know, Dick," he said, a little confused. "A parson, who was knocking about over there in a threadbare coat, came in and saw Bartle, and talked to him about the thief on the cross. Bartle couldn't see it; his fears didn't let him; *you* may."

"Yes, yes," replied Sir Vincent, with a half smile, but Roland thought it looked like a peaceful one. "I have had a parson with me, also, Roland."

Roland's face lighted up with a kind of reverence. Sir Vincent put out his hand and stroked the dog.

"You'll be kind to him, Roland?"

"Oh, won't I, Dick! What's his name?"

"Spot."

"Here! Spot, Spot!"

"Go, Spot. Go to your future master."

"Come, then, old fellow. Spot! Spot!"

The dog made a sudden leap to the side of Roland at the call, and rubbed his nose against the extended hand.

"I'll be as good to him as if he were a child," spoke Roland, in his earnestness. See! we are friends already, Vincent."

And this simple-hearted young fellow was the scapegoat they had all despised! Sir Vincent caught the strong hand and clasped it within his delicate one.

CHAPTER XLII.

A WIDE BLACK BAND ON ROLAND'S HAT.

EARLY in the afternoon, and the Waterloo Railway Station. A gentleman got out of a first-class carriage, and made his way to one of the waiting hansoms.

"Stop at the first hatter's you come to," he said to the driver.

Leaping out when his directions were obeyed, he entered the shop, and asked for a mourning band to be put on his hat; a "deep one." You do not need to be told who it was, and what the black band was for. Vincent had died about eight o'clock in the morning, and the Natal traveller was Sir Roland Yorke.

Save for the fact that he had some money in his pockets, in actual reality, which afforded a kind of personal ease to the mind, he was anything but elated at the change of position. On the contrary, he felt very much subdued. Roland could not be selfish, and the grief and shock brought him by the unexpected death of his cousin Vincent, outweighed every thought of self. He had already tasted some of the fruits of future power. Servants and others had referred to him that morning as the new baronet and their master; his pleasure had been consulted in current matters touching the house and estate, his orders been requested as to the funeral. Roland was head of all now, the sole master. Setting aside the sadness that filled his heart to the exclusion of all else, the very suddenness of the change would prevent him as yet realizing it in his own mind.

With the conspicuous band on his hat, stretching up rather above the top of the crown, Roland entered the cab again, and ordered it to the office. There he presented himself to Mr. Greatorex.

"Well?" said the lawyer, turning round from his desk. "So you are back again! What did Sir Vincent want with you? Has he made you his bailiff?"

Roland sadly shook his head. And Mr. Greatorex saw that something was wrong.

"What's amiss?" he hastily enquired.

"If you please, sir, I am Sir Roland now."

"You are what?" exclaimed Mr. Greatorex.

"It's only too true," groaned Roland. "Poor Vincent is dead. Mr. Greatorex, I'd work on all-fours for a living to the end of my days, if I could bring him back to life again. I never thought to come in, I'm sure; and I wouldn't willingly. He died at eight o'clock this morning."

Mr. Greatorex leaned back in his chair and relieved his mind by a pastime he might have caught from Roland—that of staring. Not having heard of Sir Vincent's accident, this assertion of his death sounded only the more surprising. Was Roland telling the truth? He almost questioned it. Roland, perceiving the doubt, gave a summary of particulars, and Mr. Greatorex slowly realized the facts.

Sir Roland Yorke! The light-headed, simple-minded clerk, who had been living on a pound a week and working sufficiently hard to get it, suddenly transformed into a powerful baronet! It was like a romance or a child's fairy tale. Mr. Greatorex rose and held out his hand.

"I must congratulate you on your succession, Sir Roland, sad though the events are that have led to it."

"Now don't! please don't!" interrupted Roland. "I hope nobody will do that, it sounds like a wrong on poor dead Dick. Oh, I'd bring him to life again if I were able."

"I trust you will make us your men of business, Sir Roland," resumed Mr. Greatorex, still standing. "We have been solicitors to the head of the Yorke family in succession for many years now."

"I'm sure if you'll be at the trouble of acting for me, I should like nothing better, sir: bad manners to me if I could have any different thought. And I've put your name and Mr. Bede's down in the list for the funeral, if you'll please attend it. There'll be but a few of us in all. Gerald (though I shouldn't think *he* will show his face at it), William Yorke, Arthur Channing, two or three of Dick's friends, and you and Mr. Bede. Poor Dick said to me when he was dying not to have the same kind of show he had for his father's funeral, he saw the folly of it now, but the quietest I could order. I think he has gone to heaven, Mr. Greatorex."

But that the subject was a solemn one, Mr. Greatorex had certainly laughed at the quaint simplicity of the concluding sentence. One

reminiscence in connection with the past funeral rose forcibly in his mind—of the slighting neglect shown to the young man now before him. He, the real heir-presumptive, only that nobody had the wit to think of it, was not deemed good enough to follow his uncle to the grave. But he stood in his place now.

Bede would not be able to attend the ceremony, Mr. Greatorex said aloud : he was already in France, having crossed over with his wife by the night mail-train.

"What is the matter with him?" asked Roland. "He looked as ill as he could look yesterday."

"I don't know what the matter is," said Mr. Greatorex. "He has an inward complaint, and I fear it must be making great strides. His name will be taken out of the firm to-morrow, and give place to Frank's. It was Bede's own request: it is as if he fears he may never be capable of business again."

"I'm sure I hope he will," cried Roland in his sympathy. "About me, Mr. Greatorex? Of course I'd not like to leave you at a pinch; I'll come to the office to-morrow morning and do my work as usual for a day or two, until you've found somebody to replace me. I should like to take this afternoon for myself."

But Mr. Greatorex, with a smile, thought they should not need to trouble Sir Roland: which was no doubt an agreeable intimation: and Roland really had a good deal to do in connection with his new position.

"If I'm not forgetting!" he exclaimed, just as he was taking his departure. "There's the money you lent me, sir, and I thank you for the loan of it."

In taking the sovereign from his pocket, he pulled out several. Mr. Greatorex jokingly remarked that he had apparently no longer need to borrow.

"It is from poor Dick's desk," sadly observed Roland. "He told me there was enough money in it to repay the pound to you and get my clothes out of pawn, and that it would be all my own when he died. Well, what do you think I found there when I opened it to-day?—Nearly a hundred pounds in gold and bank-notes!"

"But you have not got all that about you, I hope?"

"Yes I have, sir; it was safer to bring it up than to leave it. I shall pay it into the banker's. I've got to show myself there, I suppose, and leave my signature in their books; it won't be so neat a one as poor Dick's."

Roland departed; looking in for a moment at the office as he went out, and announcing himself as Sir Roland Yorke, upon which Mr. Hurst burst out laughing in his face. He dashed in on Mrs. Jones with his news, ate nearly the whole of a shilling Madeira cake that happened to be on the table, while he talked, and made a voluntary promise to that tart and disbelieving matron to refurnish her house from top to bottom. Next the cab was ordered to the banker's, where his business

was satisfactorily adjusted. Gerald's chambers were not far off, and Roland took them next. The servant met him with the bold assertion that his master was out.

"Don't bother yourself to deny him, my good man; I saw his face at the window," said Roland, with frankness. "You may safely show me in: I am not a creditor."

"Well, sir, we are obliged to be excessively cautious just now, and that's the truth," apologized the man, in a tone of confidence. "Mr. Yorke, I think?"

"Sir Roland Yorke," corrected Roland.

"Sir?" returned the man, looking at him as if he thought he saw a lunatic.

"Sir Roland Yorke," was the emphatic repetition. "Have the goodness to announce me."

And the servant opened the room door and did it.

As Roland saw Gerald's quick look of surprise, he would under other circumstances have shaken in his shoes at the fun. But sadness wholly reigned over him to-day. And—if truth must be told—a terrible aversion to Gerald, for his work and its fruits had possession of the new heir.

"Oh, it's you," cried Gerald, roughly. "What on earth possessed the fellow?"

"The fellow did right, Gerald. I gave him my name, and he announced it."

"Don't come here with your fool's blabber. He said 'Sir Roland Yorke.'"

"And it is what I am."

Gerald's face grew dark with passion. He had an especial dislike to be played with.

"Vincent's dead, Gerald."

"It is a lie."

"Vincent died this morning at eight o'clock," repeated Roland. "I was with him: he telegraphed for me yesterday. Look at this mourning band"—showing his hat—"I've just been to get it put on. Do you think I'd have the face to invent a jest on this subject? Vincent Yorke is dead, poor fellow, and I have come into things as Sir Roland. Not that I can fully believe it myself yet."

The tone of the voice, the deep black band, and a kind of subtle instinct within himself brought conviction of the truth home to Gerald Yorke. Had it been to save his fame, he could not have helped the loud brazen tone from going out of his voice, or the dread that took possession of his whole aspect.

"What—has—he—died—of?"

"The gunshot wound."

A pause. Gerald broke it.

"It was going on well. I heard so only two days ago."

"But it took a sudden turn for the worse; and he is dead."

Gerald's face assumed a tinge as of bluish chalk. Was he to have *two* lives on his soul? Hamish Channing's had surely been enough for him without Vincent Yorke's. Pushing back his damp hair, he met Roland's steady look, and so made believe to feel nothing, went to the fire and stirred it gently.

"Why did the doctors let it take *this* turn?" he asked, flinging down the paper. "It was as simple a wound as ever was given."

"I suppose they'd have helped it, if they could."

Another pause.

"Well—of course—as you *have* succeeded, I must congratulate you," said Gerald, stiffly and lamely. Absently, too, for he was buried in thought, reflecting on what an idiotic policy his to Roland had been: but this contingency had never occurred to him more than it had to Roland.

"Vincent had a good lot of property that was not entailed," resumed Gerald. "Do you know who he has willed it to? Did he make a will?"

"He made a will yesterday, before telegraphing for me."

Gerald lifted his face with a transient hope.

"I wonder if he has remembered me?"

"I think not. Except some legacies to the servants, and a keepsake for Miss Treherm—his watch and diamond ring, I fancy—he said nobody's name was mentioned in the will but mine. It has not been opened: I thought I'd leave it till after the funeral. I am the executor."

"*You!*—you don't want his ready money as well as his inheritance!" spoke Gerald, in a foam.

"I'm sure I didn't want any of it. I only thought to be his bailiff; but I can't help it if it has come to me," was Roland's quiet answer, as he turned to depart. "Good afternoon, Gerald. I thought it right to call and tell you of his death: you may like to draw your blinds down."

"Thanks," said Gerald, sarcastically.

"You will receive an invitation to the funeral, Gerald. But I'd like to intimate that if you do not care to attend, I shall not look upon it in the light of a slight," added candid Roland, who really spoke in simple good-nature. "We shall be enough without you if you'd rather stay away."

Before Gerald's awful rage at the speech was over, for he looked upon it as bestowed in a patronising light from the new baronet, Roland was vaulting into the waiting cab. Gerald had the pleasure of peeping on from the window.

"Sir Roland Yorke!—Sir Roland Yorke!" he spoke aloud in his horrible mortification. "Sunny Mead for his home, and four thousand a year landed property, and heaps of ready money. Curse the

beggar! Curse the shot that has brought him the luck of the inheritance! I'd sell my soul for it to have been mine. I should wear the honours better than he. I wish to heaven he could die to-night!"

And Mr. Gerald Yorke, looking after the receding cab with a dark and sullen countenance, could indeed have sold his soul; if by so doing he might have annihilated his brother and stepped into his place. He was in that precise frame of mind for which some few men in the world's actual history, and a vast many in fiction, have stained their hands with crime for the greed of gain.

* * * * *

Tread lightly, speak softly; for death is already hovering in the chamber. As Roland enters on tiptoe he takes in the scene at a glance. Hamish lying with closed eyes, and the live ball, Miss Nelly, tucked outside beside him, her golden curls mingling with his damp hair. A sea of old Helstonleigh faces seems to be gathered round; save that Roland silently clasps Arthur's hand, he takes notice of none. Edging himself between Annabel and Tom Channing, as they stand side by side, he bends his face of concern downwards. The slight stir aroused Hamish, he opens his eyes, and holds up his feeble hand with a remnant of the old smile.

"Back again! Head bailiff?"

Roland bit his lip. His chest was heaving with emotion, his face working. Hamish, who retained his keenest perceptive faculties to the last, spoke again in his faint voice.

"Is it good news?"

"It's good news. Good news, Hamish, and at the same time awfully bad. Vincent's dead, and I'm—I'm in his shoes."

Hamish did not seem to understand. Neither did the others.

"It's me to come after him, poor fellow, you see. I am Sir Roland now."

As the words fell upon the previously silent room, you might have heard a pin drop. Cheeks flushed, eyes looked out their questioning surprise at the speaker. Upon Hamish alone the communication seemed to make no impression: earthly interests were to him now as nothing.

"You will give me Annabel with a will, Hamish, now that I have come into the family inheritance?"

"I had already given her to you, so far as my best will was good to do it. Roland——"

The voice seemed to be fading away altogether, but in the eyes there was an eager gaze. Roland bent his head lower to catch the sounds about to issue from the lips.

"There's a different and a better inheritance, Roland; one of love and light, and everlasting peace. You will both of you strive for that."

"Yes, that we will. And gain it too. Oh, Hamish, if you could

but stop with us a bit longer!" burst forth Roland, letting his suppressed emotion come out with a choking sob. "It's nothing all round but dying. First Vincent, and now you! I never knew such a miserable world as this. I'd have laid down my own life to keep either of you in it."

There stole a smile of ineffable peace over the dying face. It seemed to have caught a ray of the heavenly light in which it would so soon be shining.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DREAMS REALIZED.

It is certainly not often in this life that improbable dreams of fame and fortune get to be realized as they were in the case of Roland Yorke. Down he went to his native place, Helstonleigh, in all the glory of fame and fortune that his imagination had been wont to picture, the dog Spot with him. He paid his creditors their debts twice over: he made presents to his mother and the world; he went knocking at old Galloway's door and caused himself to be fully announced, as he had at Gerald's—Sir Roland Yorke. He ran in and out of the proctor's office at will, took possession of his former stool there, and answered callers as if he were the veritable clerk he used to be. He promised a living to Tom Channing, promotion in India to Charley; made a sweeping bow to William Yorke the first time he met him in the street, and called out to know whether he might be considered a scape-goat still. He put up a tombstone to commemorate the virtues of Jenkins. Meeting Harry Huntley, he nearly cried over Hamish. Hamish Channing's book was at length in every heart and home—ah, that he had lived to see it! The good had all come too late for *him*. Ellen would be wealthy from henceforth; for her father had regained his fortune, her aunt, stiff Miss Huntley, had died, and bequeathed to her the whole of hers, and little Miss Nelly was an heiress.

Not immediately, however, had Roland hastened to quit London for Helstonleigh, and there's something to tell about it. He had affairs to attend to first; and it took him some time to forget his daily sorrow for the dead. Roland's private belief was that he should never cease to mourn for Hamish; should never rise in the morning, or go to rest at night, without thinking of him and Gerald's miserable work. He entered on his abode at Sunny Mead, his home from henceforth, made himself acquainted with his future position, and what his exact revenues would be. In his imperfect way, but honest wish to do right, he apportioned out plenty of work for himself, and not much to spend, resolving above all things to eschew a life of frivolity and idleness. Roland would rather have followed the plough's tail day by day than sink to that.

The first few weeks he divided his time between Sunny Mead and London. When in town, he dropped in upon his old friends with native familiarity: prosperity and a title could not change Roland. The office and clerks saw him very often; Mrs. Jones's tea and muffins occasionally suffered by a guest who had a large appetite. He re-furnished that tart lady's house for her after a rather sharp battle; for at first Mrs. J. would not accept the boon. The first visitor Roland had the honour of entertaining was Lord Carrick. His white-haired lordship was flourishing in London again, and gave Roland a whole week of his hearty, genial, good-natured company at Sunny Mead.

The thorn in the flesh was Gerald, and it happened that Mr. Gerald's career came to a crisis during the week of Lord Carrick's stay at Sunny Mead. On the last day of it, when they were out in the frost, and the peer was imparting to his nephew sundry theories for the best cultivation of land, a servant ran out to announce the arrival of a lady, who had come in great haste from the railway station. She appeared to be in great distress, the man added, and said she must at once see Sir Roland.

In distress, beyond doubt; for when Roland went clattering in, wondering who it could be, there met him the tear-stained face of Winny. She had brought down a piteous tale. Gerald, arrested the previous day, had lodgings in that savoury prison, Whitecross Street; he had boldly sent her to ask Roland to pay his debts and set him free. Winny, sobbing over some luncheon that Roland good-naturedly set her down to at once, protested that she felt sure one at least of the three little girls would be found in the fire when she got back to them.

Lord Carrick drew Roland aside.

"I'm not ill-natured, my boy, as ye knew long ago, and I'd do a good turn for anybody; but I'd like to give ye a caution. *Don't begin by paying Gerald's debts.* If ye do, as sure as ye're a living man, ye'll never have a minute's peace for him to the last day of ye're life. Set him free now, and all his thanks would be to run up more for ye to pay. In a year's time he'd be in the same plight again; and he or his creditors would be bothering ye always. *Don't begin it.* Let him fight out his debts as he best can."

"It's just what I'd like to do," said Roland. "I'd not mind allowing a couple of hundred a year, or so, for Winny and the children. I meant to offer it. It might be paid to her weekly, you know, uncle, and I could slip something more into her hand whenever we met. She might get a bit of peace then. But I don't think it would be doing Gerald any real kindness in the long run to release him from his debts."

Lord Carrick nodded most emphatically.

"I need not tell Winny this, Uncle Carrick—only that she and the Kittens shall be taken care of from henceforth. She can carry a sealed note back to Gerald."

"I'll see to him," said Lord Carrick. "If he is to get any help at all, it must be from me. Ye can write the note to him. It would be the worst day's work ye ever entered on if ye attempted to help him. It is nothing else but helping people, Roland, me boy, that has kept me down, and I'd not like to see ye begin it. If Gerald can't get clear without assistance, I may come to the rescue later. But he'll have to try."

"Perhaps I might be got to allow him a hundred a year, or so, for himself later," added relenting Roland. "But I'll never have anything to do with his debts, or suffer him to look to me to pay them."

Could Gerald, in his distant and gloomy abode, but have heard this, he had surely been ready to shoot the pair of speakers, and with more intentional malignity, too, than he had shot Sir Vincent.

But we began the chapter at Helstonleigh. For once in its monotonous life that faithful city had found something to arouse it from its jog-trot course, and people flew to their doors and windows to gaze after Sir Roland Yorke. It did not seem much less improbable that the time-honoured cathedral might some night disappear altogether, than that the once improvident schoolboy of not too good repute, the careless run-a-gate who had made a moonlight flitting, and left some fifty pounds' worth of debts behind him, should come back Sir Roland, like a hero of romance.

Fruition never answers to anticipation, as Roland found, now that his golden visions came to be realized. The romantic charm of the oft-pictured dream was wanting; the green freshness of sanguine boyhood no longer threw its halo on his heart; the vivid glow of imaginative hope had mellowed down to a sober tint. In manner, in gleeful frankness, Roland was nearly as impulsive and boyish as ever; but his mind had gained a good deal of experience, and reflection had come to him. The chances and changes of the world had worked their effect; and the deaths caused, directly or indirectly, by Gerald, sat heavily on his generous heart. Adam's curse lies on all things, and there can be no pleasure without pain.

Roland did not miss it. Enough of charm was left to him. Annabel was staying with her mother, and things seemed to have gone back again to the dear old days before Roland had known the world, or tasted of its cares. Roland went calling upon his acquaintance continually, distant and near, making himself at home everywhere. Ellen Channing, worn to a thread-paper with grief, was visiting her father in her maiden home. Nelly made its charm now. The young widow would probably take up her abode at Helstonleigh, in spite of Roland's strong advice that it should be near Sunny Mead.

"I told you I should be sure to get on and make my fortune some time, Mr. Galloway."

The old proctor, whose health was failing hopelessly, returned a

slighting answer. Roland, without ceremony as usual, had dashed into the office, and was sitting at a high desk with his legs dangling. The remark was given in return for some disparaging observation as to Roland's former doings.

"*You* made it! Ugh! A great deal of that."

"Oh—well—I've come into one, at any rate."

"The only way you were ever likely to attain to one. Left to your own exertions, you'd have got back here with holes in your breeches."

"Now don't you be personal, sir," was the laughing rejoinder. "I'm Sir Roland Yorke, you know."

"And a fine Sir Roland you'll be!"

"I'll try and be a good one," said Roland emphatically, as he caught Arthur's eye—who was seated in the place of state as the head of the office, for the proctor had virtually resigned it. "Arthur knows he can trust me now: ask him else, sir. Hamish knew it also before he died."

"I should like to hear what business he had to die, and who killed him?" cried old Galloway, explosively. "It was done amongst you, I know. A nice thing for my old friend Mr. Huntley to get back to England and find his son-in-law dead: the bright, true young fellow that he loved as the apple of his eye."

"Yes, I think he was killed among us, up there," sadly avowed Roland, his honest face kindling with shame. "But I did not help in it, Mr. Galloway; I'd have given my life to save his. I wish I could!"

"Wishes won't bring him back. I saw his wife yesterday—his widow, that is. I'm sure I couldn't bear to look at her."

"Did you see sweet little Nelly?" cried Roland eagerly, his thoughts taking a turn. "If ever I have a girl of my own, I hope she'll be like that child."

"Now just you please to take yourself off, Sir Roland, and come in when we're a little less busy," returned the proctor, who was very much out of sorts that morning. "You are hindering business, just as you used to."

But perhaps the greatest of all small delights was that of encountering Mr. Butterby. Roland had just emerged from the market-house one Saturday, where he had been in the thick of the throng, making himself at home, and enquiring affably the price of butter of all the faces he remembered, and been seduced into buying a tough old gander, on the grave assurance that it was a young and tender goose, when he and the detective met face to face.

"Well?" said Roland, dangling the goose in his hand, as unblushingly as though it had been a bouquet of choice flowers.

"Well?" returned Mr. Butterby. "How are you, sir? I heard you were down here."

"Ay. I've come to set things straight that I left crooked. And glad to be able to do it at last. You've heard about me, I suppose, Butterby?"

"I've heard," assented Butterby. "You are Sir Roland Yorke, and have come into the family estates and honours, through the untimely death of Sir Vincent. A lucky shot for you, sir."

"Lucky?" groaned Roland. "Well, in one sense I suppose it was: but don't go and think me a heartless camel, Butterby. I declare to you that if I could bring Sir Vincent back, though I had to return to my work again, and the turn-up bedstead at Mrs. J.'s, I'd do it this minute cheerfully. When I sat by, watching him die, knowing he was going to make room for me, I felt downright wicked: almost as bad as my nice brother must have felt, who shot him. Did you read about it in the newspapers?—they had got it all as pat as might be. I can't think, for my part, how they lay hold of things."

Butterby nodded assent. There was little he did not read, if it could in the remotest degree concern him.

"I'm paying up, Butterby. Paying everybody, and something over. If ever I get into debt again, call me an owl. Galloway groans and grunts, and says I shall; but I fancy he knows better. What do you think? He took his hat off to me in the street yesterday! formerly he'd hardly nod to me over his shoulder sideways."

"How were the folks up yonder, Sir Roland, when you left?" asked Butterby, jerking his head in the direction of London. "Is Miss Rye all right?"

"Oh, she's uncommon jolly. The last day I called there, Mrs. J. said she supposed she and Winter—they call him Winter now—would be making a match of it. Upon that I told Miss Rye I'd buy her the wedding dress. Instead of being properly grateful, she advised me not to talk so fast. I say, Butterby, that *was* a mistake of yours, that was—the taking her into custody for the one that killed John Ollivera."

"Ay," carelessly returned Mr. Butterby, with a kind of sniff. "The best of us go in for mistakes, you know."

"I suppose *you* can't help it, just as some people can't help dreaming," observed Roland with native politeness. "I went up and saw his grave yesterday. I say, shall you ever pitch upon the right one?"

But that Mr. Butterby turned his eyes away towards the Guildhall opposite before he answered, Roland might have observed a peculiar shade cross their steady light. Whatever curious outlets his speculations had drifted to in the course of years, as to the slayer of Mr. Ollivera, he knew the truth now.

"Shan't try at it, sir. Take it from first to last, it has been about the queerest case that ever fell under mortal skill; and we are content for the future to let it be."

"I won't forget you, Butterby. You've not been a bad one on the

whole. A snuff-box would be of no use, you said ; but you shall have something else. And look here, if ever you should come within range of my place in Surrey, I'd be glad to see you there for half an hour's chat. Good-day, old Butterby. Isn't this a prime goose? I've just been giving seven shillings for it."

He and his ancient goose went vaulting off. Roland frequently took articles home to help garnish Lady Augusta's dinner-table ; very much to the wrath of the cook, who found she had double work.

But it must not be thought Roland led entirely an idle life at Helstonleigh. Apart from personal calls on his friendship, in the shape of dropping in upon people, he had work on his hands. By Mrs. J.'s permission he was replacing the plain stone on poor Jenkins's grave with one of costly marble. Roland himself undertook the inscription. Not being accustomed to composition, he found it a puzzling task.

"Here's to the memory of JOSEPH JENKINS. He was too good for this world, inoffensive as a young sparrow, and did everybody's work as well as his own. Put upon by the office and people in general, he bore it all meekly, according to his nature, never turning again. A cough took him off to Heaven, leaving Mrs. J. behind, and one or two to regret him, who knew his virtues. This tribute is erected by his attached friend, (who was one of the worst to put upon him in life,) and sorrowful, ROLAND YORKE."

Such was the inscription for the marble tomb-stone, as it went in to the sculptor. That functionary suggested some slight alterations, which Sir Roland was reluctant to accede to. There ensued writing and counter-writing, and the epitaph finally inscribed contained but little (like some bills that pass through Parliament) of the original.

And so the sweet days of spring glided on, and the time came for Roland to depart. To depart until June, when he would return to claim his bride. Tom Channing should marry them, and nobody else, avowed Roland ; and if the Reverend Bill put up his back at not having the first finger in the pie, why he must put it up. Annabel was his confidante in all things ; and Annabel thought she should rather be married by her brother, than by William Yorke.

The once happy home of the Channings bore the marks of time's chances and changes. The house was the same as were its elements for peace, but some of its inmates had quitted it for ever. Mr. Channing, Arthur, Tom, Charles, and Annabel : they moved about in their mourning garments, with their regretful faces, thinking ever of him who had whilom made its sunshine, Hamish the bright. He had gone to a better world, where there was neither pain nor tears, neither cruel injustice nor heart-breaking sorrow ; but this consolation is always hard to realize, and their grief was lasting. Mrs. Channing looked aged and worn ; the boys and girls had grown into men and women ; in old

Judith and her snow-white mob-cap, there alone appeared to be no change.

It was at length the day of Roland's departure, and he was holding a final interview with Annabel. They stood at the glass doors of the study window, open to the garden, and the warm May sun shone in gaily, making the crape on Annabel's silk dress look hot and rusty. The once untidy study, when they were all boys and girls together, had been renovated with a green carpet and delicately papered walls; the young parson now called it his.

Considering Roland's deficiencies on the score of forethought, he had really organized the plans for his future life with a great deal of wisdom. Sunny Mead was to be their sole home, and Annabel chief cash-keeper in regard to ready money. On that he was resolved, honestly avowing that he was not to be trusted with money in his pocket: it was sure to *go*. The residence in Portland Place, which Sir Richard had only held on a lease, had been given up: there was to be no town-house, no fashion, no gaiety. Annabel seconded him in all, urging moderation strenuously. He was going up now to make his bow to the Prince at a *levée*: and it was to be hoped he would accomplish it with passable decorum: and Annabel would be presented to the Queen on the first favourable opportunity, after she should be Lady Yorke. So far that was due from their position, but there the exigencies of fashionable society would for them end. Sunny Mead would be their home; and, it could not be doubted, a very happy one. They are talking of the prospect now, as they stand together: and to both it is one of rose-colour.

"But for going to Port Natal, Annabel, there's no knowing how I might have turned out—a regular drawling idler about town, as some of the Yorkes have been before me. I might have gone in for all kinds of folly, and come to no end of grief. We shall be safe down at Sunny Mead, and live like—like——" Roland stops for a simile.

"Rational people," puts in Annabel with a smile.

"Fighting-cocks," says Roland. "I shall make a good farmer."

"But, Roland," she rejoins, dubiously, "I hope you'll not discharge the bailiff until you feel that you are fully competent to the management. You don't know much of farming yet."

"Not know much of farming!" exclaims Roland, his eyes opening with surprise. "After all my experience at Port Natal! Look at the pigs I had to manage—obstinate, grunting animals—and the waggons and carts I was put to drive—filled with calves sometimes! I'm not obliged to take the threshing and mowing myself, you know. As to the bailiff, he shall stay on until you send him away, if it's two years to come."

She bends her blushing face a little forward, plucking an early rose-

bud. Roland takes it from her and puts it in his coat. On her finger flashes a valuable diamond ring, the pledge of their engagement.

"We won't have a frying-pan in the house, Annabel. I can't bear to see one since that failure at Port Natal."

She turns her laughing eyes on him. Roland honestly thinks they are the truest, sweetest, best the world ever contained, and feels he can never be thankful enough that he is to call them his.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE summer and the day were alike on the wane. It was the end of July, and a dull evening. Mr. Greatorex was sitting alone in the coming twilight, in the large and handsome dining-room, where we first saw him at the beginning of this history. Haggard he had looked then, waiting to hear the particulars of his favourite nephew's death; far more haggard he looked now, for the truth in regard to it was at length disclosed to him.

He wore deep mourning. The son, whose appearance of ill-health had of late given him so much concern, was dead: Bede. Alas! it was not illness of body that had ailed Bede Greatorex, and turned his days to one ever-moving, never-ceasing tumultuous sea of misery, but that far worse affliction, illness of mind. In bodily sickness there may arise intervals of light, when the suffering is not felt so keenly, or the heavenly help is nearer for support; in such mental sickness, grave as Bede's was, such intervals never come.

After quitting home at the turn of Christmas, and travelling for a month or two hither and thither, Bede settled down in a remote French town. There was a very small colony of English in it, and an English chaplain, who did the duty for nothing. Bede had not intended to make it a permanent halting-place, but his weakness increased greatly, and he seemed never willing to attempt another move onwards. Mrs. Bede grumbled woefully: she called the town a desert and their lodgings a barn; truth to say, the rooms were spacious and had as good as nothing in them. She amused herself—such amusement as it was—by taking drives in the early spring freshness, and talking French, for improvement, with a fashionable Parisian *femme de chambre*, whom she had found herself lucky enough to engage. In June Bede died: and the date of his death happened, by a rather singular coincidence, to be that of Roland Yorke's wedding-day. But that can pass.

With Bede's death, a month ago now, things in the office had undergone some fresh arrangements. Frank Greatorex was his father's sole partner in the practice. Frank was soon to bring home his wife, and it

was to be hoped she would make a happier home of the dwelling than its late mistress had done. There could be little doubt of it, and Mr. Greatorex stood a fair chance of regaining some of his domestic comfort. The prospects of Bede's widow were not flourishing. Bede had not left a shilling behind him; a little debt, in fact, instead; that is, *she* was in debt: and the bills for his funeral and other incidental expenses had come over to Mr. Greatorex. There had been no married settlement on Louisa Joliffe: she was now left to the mercy of her father-in-law; and though a generous man by nature and habit, Mr. Greatorex was not showing himself generous in this. In a cool, business-like letter, conveyed to her personally by a trustworthy clerk, Mr. Greatorex had informed her that henceforward she would be allowed two hundred pounds a year. One hundred pounds in addition he made her a present gift of. The clerk dispatched with the letter and money was Mr. Brown, who had entirely resumed his name of Winter; the office, not getting into the new habit readily, usually called him Mr. Brown Winter. Mr. Winter was commissioned to discharge the above-mentioned bills, and to see a stone placed over the grave, the inscription for which had been written down by Mr. Greatorex. It was short as might be: only the following words, with the date of death:—

BEDE GREATOREX.

AGED THIRTY-NINE.

"Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden."

Mr. Winter had executed his charges, and was back again. The clerks heard with very little surprise that he was to be promoted amidst them: the confidential manager in future under Mr. Greatorex and his son; one to whom the office would have to look up to as a master. Rumour went that Mr. Winter was about to become a qualified solicitor: not from any view of setting up for himself, but that he might be more efficient for his duties in the house of Greatorex and Greatorex. His salary would be handsome: it had been already considerably augmented since the month of January last. Mr. Winter had taken a small, pretty house, and would soon bring a wife home to it: Alletha Rye was to exchange her name to Alletha Winter. The clerks in general looked upon it that Mr. Winter's promotion took its rise in his undoubted business merit and capacity; but, in point of fact, it was owing to a few lines written by Bede to his father. "The man is of sterling merit: he has forgotten self in striving patiently to benefit and shield me; reward him for my sake. I am sure he will repay in faithfulness all you can do for him."

Little more than this did Bede say: not a word as to the nature of

what the benefit or the shielding had been. Mr. Greatorex knew now, for a revelation had been made to him through Judge Kene. Bede, only the day before his death, had posted a letter to Sir Thomas Kene, one that he had spent a week in writing, getting to it at intervals.

The anguish that communication, and other things, brought to Mr. Greatorex, was very sharp still. He was feeling it as he sat there in the evening twilight. Bede's death he had, in one sense, almost ceased to mourn, knowing now what a happy release from mental pain it must have been. But he could not think with the smallest patience of Bede's wife: never again, never again. *She* had been the primary author of all the misery; but for her his son—ay, and some one else, dear to him as a son—had been, in all human probability, living now, happy, peaceful, and playing a good and busy part on the world's stage.

"Will you admit visitors, sir?"

"Eh! what!"—and Mr. Greatorex started up half in alarm as the servant spoke, so deeply had he been buried in far-away thoughts.

"Visitors this evening!—no. Stay, Philip. Who are they?"

"Sir Roland and Lady Yorke, sir."

"Oh, I'll see them," said Mr. Greatorex. "Ask them to walk up."

Roland and his wife, passing through London from their wedding tour, part of which had been spent in Ireland, at Lord Carrick's, had halted for a night at one of the hotels. "To see old friends," said Roland. Not that he had many to see: Mrs. J. and Mr. Greatorex nearly comprised them. Winny Yorke and her children were in Wales with her mother. Gerald had sent them, "as a temporary thing," till he could get "a bit straight." When that desirable epoch might be expected to dawn, was hidden in the mystery of the future. Gerald had been a good month in Whitecross Street prison, done to death pretty nearly with his creditors' reproaches, who used to go down in a body to abuse him, when they found there was no chance of their getting a farthing. He and his chambers had been sold up; and altogether Gerald had come to considerable grief. Just now he was in Paris, enjoying himself on a sum of money that Lord Carrick had been induced to give him, and on the proceeds from an article that he supplied twice a week to a London newspaper. He thought himself terribly hard-worked; and slightly relieved his bile by telling everybody that his brother Roland was the greatest villain under the sun. Roland meant to find him a post if he could, and meanwhile took care of Winny and the little ones: Gerald quietly ignored that.

"Sir Roland and Lady Yorke."

Mr. Greatorex met them with out-stretched hands, giving Annabel a fatherly kiss on her blushing face. He quite forgot her new elevation, remembering her only as the sweet and simple girl who had made sunshine in his house at odd moments. She looked sweet and simple, still

quite unaltered. Roland, on his part, had not attained the smallest additional dignity: he clattered in just as of yore. They were going to Sunny Mead on the morrow, and he began telling of his future plans for the happy home life.

Mr. Greatorex smiled as he listened.

"I don't fancy you will give us much work, Sir Roland, in the way of incurring debts and trouble, and coming to us to get you clear of them."

"No, thank you; I leave that to Gerald, Mr. Greatorex," added Roland, his eyes shining with honest light, his face meeting that of his ex-master. "I promised Vincent when he was dying that I'd keep clear of trouble: I as good as promised Hamish: I'd not go from my word to *them*, you know. And, what's more, I shall never wish to."

"I see. You will be a dead loss to us. The Yorkes in general have been profitable clients."

Roland took the words seriously, and his mouth fell a little.

"I'm very sorry, sir, I—I'll give you a present every year to make up for the deficiency, if you'll accept it. A golden inkstand, or something of that sort."

Mr. Greatorex looked at him with a smile, never speaking. Roland resumed, thoroughly in earnest, his voice low.

"It's such an awful deal of money, you see, four thousand a year, besides a house and lots of other things. Two people could never spend it, and if we could, we don't think it would be doing right. Annabel and I see things alike. We mean to put aside half of our income against a rainy day, say; or—there are so many people who want help. You see, Mr. Greatorex, we had both learnt to live on little. But I'm sure I shall be sorry if you look upon me as a loss."

"You can repay me, Roland, better than by a golden inkstand," said Mr. Greatorex, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Let me come to you for a week annually when the summer roses are in bloom; and do you tell me, year by year, that you have adhered to your proposed simple mode of life."

Roland was in the skies at once. "It is a bargain, mind that," he said. "You will come to us always with the summer roses. As to a week only, we'll talk about that."

"And Jane shall meet you, sir," interposed Annabel with shy joy. "She is very happy at her school; I often have letters from her. Roland and I were thinking of having her at Christmas, if you don't mind."

"And Nelly Channing too, if her mother will spare her," put in Roland. "And we have talked about those three little mites in Wales. It would be good to have the lot together, and give them a bit of pleasure. They should have a jolly Christmas tree; and we'd get over some boxes of lumps of delight from Turkey, by one of the P. and O.

steamers, and I'd bring them up to the wax-work. Annabel and I both love children."

"And I hope to my heart you may have some of your own to bless you!" rejoined Mr. Greatorex with unaccountable emotion. "To bless you when they are young; bless you when they—when they—shall be grown. God grant you may never have cause to weep for them in tears of blood! Many of earth's sorrows are hard to bear, but that is the weightiest that Heaven can inflict upon us."

Roland stared a little. The thing seemed nearly as incomprehensible to his view of social life, as that he should have to weep for some defect in the moon.

"We'd bring them up in the best way, Mr. Greatorex," was the simple answer. "Annabel would, you may be sure, and I'd try to. I don't think I got brought up in the best way myself: there was too much scuffling and scrambling. Mrs. J. once said—I beg your pardon, Annabel."

For Annabel was trying to express to Mr. Greatorex their regret at his son's death. The strange emotion that had shaken him she knew must be felt for Bede.

"We are both of us very sorry, sir, for him and for you."

"My dear, you need not be," spoke Mr. Greatorex, in a low, sad tone. "His life had grown weary; and death, to him, must have been like a welcome rest at the close of day. A little sooner, a little later—what does it matter?"

"And for the muffs of doctors not to be able to cure him! Mr. Greatorex, when I remember him, and Vincent Yorke, and Hamish Channing, my respect for the medical profession does not go up. Halloo! who's this?" broke off Roland.

Philip was coming in with a cloud of surprise on his face, while a rustle as of extensive petticoats might be heard in his ears. He addressed his master with deprecation, conscious of something to tell that might not be very agreeable.

"It is Mrs. Bede Greatorex, sir."

"Who?" hurriedly exclaimed Mr. Greatorex.

"Mr. Bede's widow, sir. She has arrived with a French maid and a cab full of boxes."

No need to reiterate the news, for Mrs. Bede stood in view. Mr. Greatorex seized his servant by the coat like one in alarm, and gave a private order.

"Keep the cab. Don't unload the boxes. Mrs. Bede Greatorex will not remain here."

Mrs. Bede Greatorex, a widow of a month, was not less fashionable in appearance than when she was a wife. Rather more so of the two. Her dress of rich silk and crape was a model for the mode-books, her hair was wonderful to behold. A small hob of something white peeped

out atop of the chignon ; looking close it might be discovered to be an inch of quilled net : and its wearer called it a widow's cap with all the brass in life.

She held out her hand to Mr. Greatorex, but he seemed not to see it. That his resentment against this woman was one of bitterness, could not be mistaken. Mrs. Bede did not appear to notice the coldness of the greeting. Brushing past Annabel, she cast a rather contemptuous look towards her, and said some slighting words.

"What ! are *you* here again ? I thought the house was rid of you."

"This is my wife ; Lady Yorke," spoke Roland, in as haughty a tone as it was possible for him to assume. "Don't forget it, if you please, Mrs. Bede Greatorex."

She looked from one to the other of them. That Roland had succeeded to the family honours, she knew, but she had not heard of his marriage. The poor young governess she had put upon and made unhappy, Lady Yorke ! A moment's pause : Mrs. Bede's manner changed as if by magic, and she kissed Annabel on both cheeks, French fashion. Nobody knew better than she on which side her bread was buttered.

"Ah, dear me, it's fine to be you, Annabel ! What changes since we last met. You a wife and I a widow."

Mr. Greatorex took an impatient step forward, as if to speed her departure. She turned to him, speaking of her husband.

"I think Bede might have got well if he would. I used to tell him so. The doctors made an examination afterwards, and found, as you have heard, that there was no specific disease. He wasted away, wasted and wasted ; it was like as though there were a consuming fire ever within him, burning him away to death."

"My goodness !" cried Roland. "Poor Bede !"

"It was most unsatisfactory : I never saw anything like it in my life before," tartly retorted Mrs. Bede, for her husband's death had not pleased her, and she resented it openly. Not for the loss or love of him, but for the loss of his means. "I think he might have got well had he struggled for it. If you'll believe me, only the day before he died, he went out in a carriage to the post-office, that he might post a letter himself to Sir Thomas Kene."

No one answered her, or made any comment.

"Is my old room ready for me ?"

Mr. Greatorex, to whom the question was more particularly put, motioned her towards the door, and moved thither himself. "I wish to speak with you in private for a minute," he said. "Pardon me, Sir Roland, I will be back directly."

That Mrs. Bede Greatorex had come to take the house by storm, hoping thereby to resume her late footing in it, Mr. Greatorex knew just as well as she. His letter to her, delivered by George Winter, was un-

mistakeably plain; and he did wonder at the hardihood which had brought her hither, after its receipt.

"You cannot have misunderstood my letter," he said to her, as they turned into the room that had once been her boudoir. "I must beg to refer you to it. This house can never shelter you again."

"But it must," she answered.

"Never again; never again."

"At least, I must stay here for some days, until I can decide where my residence shall be," she persisted, her voice taking the unpleasant shriek that it always took in anger. "You can't deny me that."

Mr. Greatorrex raised his hand as if to waive off the argument and the words.

"Philip shall see you to an hotel, if you feel incompetent to drive to one with your maid," he said, slightly sarcastic. "But under my roof—it once sheltered in happiness my poor son—you may not remain."

"I was your son's wife," she passionately said.

"I will tell you what you were to him, if you wish. I don't press it."

"Well?"

"His curse."

"Thank you."

"His curse before marriage; his curse after it."

As he stood there, with his face of pain, speaking not in an angry tone, but one mournfully subdued, certain items connected with the past rose up to fill the mind of Mrs. Bede Greatorrex. She was aware then that he knew all; she had some little shame left in her, and her very brow grew crimson.

"I cannot imagine what you may have heard, or be suspecting," she said, falteringly. "The past is past. I did nothing very wrong: nothing but what plenty of other girls do."

"May God forgive you, Louisa Greatorrex, as I know He has forgiven *him*."

It was surging up in her mind like angry waves, that far gone-by time, one event replacing another. During her prolonged visit to this very house as Louisa Joliffe, she had suffered Bede to become passionately attached to her. Suffered?—it was she who drew him and drew him on. She engaged herself to him privately—a solemn engagement—and Bede acceded to her request that it should be kept secret for a time. She did not like Bede; she was playing an utterly false part; she coveted the good income and position that would be hers as his wife; but she rather disliked him. Her motive in demanding that their engagement should be concealed, was a hope that some offer more desirable might turn up. Oh that Bede had suspected it! He looked for her to be his wife as surely as he looked for Heaven. After her return home from her visit—and John Ollivera was sojourning at Helstonleigh, she played exactly the same game over with him, drawing

him on to love her, and engaging herself to him in private. She liked *him*, but she did not like to have to wait an indefinite number of years, until the young barrister should find himself in a position to marry. Which of the two she would eventually have chosen, was a matter that must remain in uncertainty for ever; most likely (she acknowledged so to herself) Bede and his wealth. Things went on smoothly enough, she corresponding ardently with both of them in secret, until the time of the March assizes—so often told of—and the fatal night when Bede Greatorex came down to Helstonleigh, on a mission to his cousin. The *contretemps*, the almost certainty of discovery, the very probable fear that she should lose both her lovers, nearly drove Louisa out of her senses. That something in connection with it had passed between Bede and his cousin, she knew from Bede's manner that evening at her mother's; how much, she did not dare to ask. The following morning, when the news was brought to her that Mr. Ollivera had destroyed himself, she felt like a guilty woman. Whatever might have been the mystery of the death; whether he had really committed suicide, or whether Bede had shot him in the passion of his hot Spanish blood—and it was impossible but that she should have her latent doubts—*she* was the primary cause, and she knew it, and felt it. Had she gone and killed him herself she could not have felt it more. She became aware of another thing—that Bede Greatorex, searching amidst the effects of the dead on the following day, must have found her love-letters—more impassioned letters than she was wont to write to *him*. Bede did not visit her again during his stay at Helstonleigh, and she would not have dared to seek him. Some months later they met by accident in London: were thrown together three or four times. Bede renewed his offer of marriage, and she accepted him at once; the doubt in her mind as to the part he might have taken in John Ollivera's death never having been solved. She conveniently ignored it, for the glowing prospect of an establishment was all in all. But what sort of a wife did she make him?—how much did Bede, in his chivalric devotion, have to bear?—she alone knew; she knew it now as she stood there, and her attempt to carry it off with a high hand to Mr. Greatorex failed signally. If ever the true sense of her sin should be brought home by Heaven to Louisa Greatorex, its weight, as connected with the treatment of her husband, would be well-nigh greater than she could bear. A curse to him before marriage: a curse to him after, Mr. Greatorex had well said it.

"Am I to starve in future, that you won't give me a home?" she burst forth, driving other thoughts away from her. "What's two hundred a-year? How am I to live?"

"My recommendation to you was, that you should live in Boulogne; with or near your mother," Mr. Greatorex answered, calmly. "The two hundred pounds will be amply sufficient for that."

"Two hundred pounds!" she retorted, rudely. "I shall spend that on my dress."

"As you please, of course. It is the sum that will be paid you in quarterly instalments of fifty pounds, as long as I live. At my death, the half of it only would be secured to you. Should you marry again, the payments would altogether cease. All this I stated to you in my letter: I repeat it now. Not another shilling will you receive from me—in life or after death."

She saw her future; saw it all laid out before her as on a map; and her face took a blank look, betraying mortification and despair. No more ravishing toilettes or French waiting-maids; no more costly dinner-givings, or magnificent kettle-drums. Mrs. Bede Greatorex and society must henceforth live tolerably far apart. The home she had so despised, this that she was now being turned from, would be a very palace compared to the lodgings in Boulogne.

"To prolong this interview will not be productive of further result," spoke Mr. Greatorex, taking a step towards the door. "I must beg to remind you that friends are waiting for me."

"And my clothes, that I left here? And the ornaments that were mine?"

"Everything belonging to you has been packed ready for removal. The cases shall be all sent to whatever place you may name."

She turned away without another word. Mr. Greatorex rang the bell. Outside, sitting underneath one of the white statues, near the small conservatory, was the French maid, inwardly railing against the want of politeness of these miserable Anglishe. Trusty Philip had warned her that she need not go up higher.

The cab drove away with them, and Mr. Greatorex returned to the dining-room with a relieved heart.

"She is done with at last, thank Heaven! Let us have tea together, Roland," he added, with a hearty smile. "Lady Yorke will take off her bonnet, and make it for us; as she did when she was my little friend Annabel Channing."

* * * * *

Copy of the letter received by Judge Kene from Bede Greatorex.

"As you know so much, Sir Thomas, I owe it to you and to myself to afford some further explanation. You have shown yourself a true friend: add to the obligation, by imparting the details I now write to Henry William Ollivera.

"When I was despatched to Helstonleigh on that fatal mission, I was engaged to be married to Louisa Joliffe, and loved her passionately. The engagement had existed several months, but it was at her request kept a secret to ourselves. After delivering the message and business I was charged with to John, we sat on in his room talking of indifferent matters. I said that I should spend the evening at the

Joliffes': John laughed a little, and said perhaps he should. One word led to another, and at last he told me, premising it must be in confidence, that he was engaged to Louisa. I thought he was joking; my answer annoyed him; and he went on to say things about Louisa's love for him, and their future marriage. That nearly drove me wild. What, I hardly know now. It seemed to me that he had treacherously stepped in to strive to take my bride from me, to win her for himself, my one little ewe-lamb. We recriminated on each other: she had deceived us both, but neither of us suspected it then; and we felt something like rival tiger-cats: at least I know I did. Whenever my Spanish blood got up I was a madman—as you may remember, Kene, for you saw me once or twice in earlier days—I was nothing else that wicked evening. At some taunt of his, or it sounded like one to me, I took up the pistol that lay on the table underneath my hand, and fired it at him. Before Heaven, where I shall so soon stand, I declare that I had no deliberate intention of killing him. I did not know whether the pistol was loaded or not. I do not even think I knew what I was doing, or that I had caught up the pistol; in my mad rage I was conscious of nothing. The shot killed him instantaneously, even in the midst of his cry. I cried out, too, with horror at what I had done; my passion faded, and I stood still as he was. Before I crossed the step or two to his succour, I saw that he was dead. How horribly I have repented since that I did not fling open the door and call out for assistance, none, save myself, can know. Self-preservation lies instinctively within us all, and I suppose that stopped me. Oh, the false coward that I have since ever called myself!—the years of concealment and misery it would have saved! All I thought of then was to get away. A short while I listened, but no sound told that any one had been within earshot. I softly opened the door to escape, putting out my head first to reconnoitre, and—found myself nearly face to face with a man. He stood on the stairs in an attitude of listening, and our eyes met in the gas-light. I never forgot his: they seemed to shine out from a mass of black hair! those same eyes afterwards puzzled my memory for years. When the eyes of my subsequent clerk, Mr. Brown, had used to strike some unpleasant chord on my memory but what I could not fathom, I never connected them with those other eyes: for Brown had put off his disguise then, and looked entirely another person. Ah, Kene! don't you see the obligation I lie under to this man, George Winter? Not at that moment did he know I had committed murder; but in a short period of time, as soon as the newspapers supplied details of the night's doings, he could but become aware of it. Had a doubt remained on his mind when he entered our office and knew me for Bède Gréatorex, the thing must have been made clear to him as daylight. To shield me he has remained under a cloud himself. I hope my father will reward

him. Even when he was giving his evidence before you and the rest, he told a lie to save me. For he said when he saw the face at the door, it was *after* the departure of Mr. Bede Greatorex. It was my face he saw, Kene: no other. All through these years he has watched my misery; and in his great compassion for what he knew my sufferings must be, has been silently lightening life to me where he could. But to go back to the time.

"I should think we gazed at each other for the space of half a minute—the man on the stairs and I. The fright of seeing some one there nearly paralysed me, and then I went in again and shut the door. It was perhaps the sight of him that caused me to attempt to throw the suspicion off myself; certainly I had not thought of it before. I put the pistol on the carpet, by the chair, as if it had fallen from John's right hand; and next, looking about on the table, I found the unfinished letter, and added the lines you know of. I seemed to be doing it in a dream; that it was not myself, but somebody else, and all in a desperate hurry, for I grew afraid of stopping. Then it occurred to me to put out the lamp—I don't know why: and upon that I went out resolutely, for I did not like the dark. Such seemed to be against me. As I opened the door this second time, some young man (not the first) was passing by. Instinct caused me to turn round and make believe to be speaking to John. What words I really said I should never have remembered but for hearing the young man, Alfred Jones, repeat them at the coroner's inquest. They served me more than I thought; for Alfred Jones unconsciously took up the natural supposition that John was also speaking to me. This version went forth to the public, and it was assumed that what happened, happened after my departure. There's no doubt that it was the chief element in throwing suspicion off me. He showed me out of the house, and thenceforward I had to try and act the part of an innocent man. I went to the "Star and Garter," and drank some brandy and water. I went thence to Mrs. Joliffe's. How I did it all, with that horrible thing upon me, I have never known. I said a few cautious words to Louisa, and by her answers I felt sure that John's boast had been (at least, in part), a vain one. As I returned up High Street, some tradesman was just standing within his side-door. He did not know I saw him. Halting, I looked at John Ollivera's windows, just opposite, and said something to the effect that John must have gone to bed—all for the man to hear me. Just afterwards I met you, Kene—do you remember it? You were going to call on John; but I said he had gone to bed, and the people of the house too, I supposed, as there was no light to be seen. I shrunk from the discovery, and would fain have put it off for ever. What a night that was for me! As I had stirred the tea at Mrs. Joliffe's, as I stirred the brandy and water at the hotel, John's face seemed to be in the liquid, staring up at me. In the dark of the bed-room, after the candle had

burnt out, I saw him in his chair, just as I had left him. I had not dared to ask for a night-light, lest it might excite suspicion. How could I answer for it that the hotel would not get to learn I was not in the habit of burning one?

"You know the rest: the discovery and the inquest that followed. Did I act my part well, Kene? I suppose so, by the result. That day—the first—you were with me when we examined John's desk, it was advised that I should look over his letters for any clue that perhaps they might show to the motive of his self-inflicted death. The large bundle of letters, Kene, came I found from Louisa Joliffe, and poor John's was no vain boast: she had been all to him that she had professed to be to me, and a traitor to both.

"Why did I marry her? you will naturally ask. Ah, why! why! Because my love for her fooled me into it: because, if you will, I was mad. When we met again, months afterwards, the passion that I thought I had killed within me rose up with tenfold force, and I yielded to it. To do so was not much less sinful (looking at it as I look now) than the other and greater crime. I saw it even as I stood with her before the altar; I saw it afterwards clearer and clearer. But I loved her even in spite of my better judgment; I love her even yet: and I have striven to do my duty by her in all indulgence, to shield her from the cares of the world.

"And there's my life's history. Oh, Kene, if I have been more sinful than other men, my merciful God knows what my expiation has been! Can you even faintly picture it to yourself? From a few minutes after the breath went out of poor John's body, my punishment set in. It was only fear just at first; it was the bitterest remorse afterwards that ever made a wreck of mortal man. I am not a murderer by nature, and John and I were dear friends. My days have been one long, wearing penance: regret for him and his shortened life—dread of my crime's discovery—one or the other filling every moment; remorse and repentance—repentance and remorse; and that it has been so is owing to Heaven's mercy. Not an hour of the day or night but I would gladly have given up my own life to restore his. After the first confused horror had passed, I should have declared the truth at the time but for my mother's sake. In her state of health it would have killed her. When she died, the time had gone by for it, and I had my father and my wife to consider still, and remained perforce silent. My father has thought my bodily health failed. In one sense, so it did; for I have been wasting away from the first, dying slowly, inch by inch.

"And that's all, Kene. When you shall have heard news of my death—it will be with you very close upon this letter—disclose the whole to Henry William Ollivera. With regard to my father, I leave the matter to you. If he in the slightest degree suspects me—and I

can but think he must, after Winter's confession, and from the easy acquiescence he gave to my coming on the Continent for an indefinite period—then tell him the whole. Heaven bless you all, and grant you the peace that can spring alone of Jesus Christ's atonement! I have dared to think it mine for some little time now.

"BEDE GREATOREX."

When the tidings of Bede's death reached him, Sir Thomas Kene went out to seek an interview with Mr. Ollivera. The clergyman read the letter, and bent his head in prolonged silence.

"After all, I suppose John's grave will have to remain undisturbed," spoke the Judge. "Winter cleared his memory."

"Yes; better so perhaps," was the slow, thoughtful reply. "If I had never before been thankful that I read the burial service over him, I should be so now. You see I was right, Kene. God be merciful to us all; for we are miserable sinners!"

THE END.



LEICESTER SQUARE SOUP-KITCHEN.*

IT has often been a problem to me whether any one has ever properly realized the misery existing in this great city of ours: the awful, searching misery always raging, but which becomes rampant as the days grow short and cold. One thing is certain—that until some practical knowledge has been gained, some personal inspection of the wretchedness that abounds has been made, it is not possible, by the utmost stretch of the imagination, to arrive at a true picture of the case.

Sitting by our warm fires, we take up a newspaper and read of people dying of cold; but though a spasm of sorrow may pass through the heart for the poor wretches, and though, to a certain extent, sympathizing with their fate, it is as beyond our power to enter into the sufferings of their slow death-tortures, as it is for a strong man to endeavour to realize the position of one dying of a long, painful disease. Well-fed, well-housed, our purses always well-filled, we cannot possibly estimate the nakedness, and starvation, and misery, that has not a roof in which to take refuge from the rains and frosts of night. It cannot come home to most of us—for mankind is apt to be careless and unthoughtful—with that force which compels us to do our utmost towards alleviating this dreadful destitution. "Out of sight out of mind" is a true saying in this, as in many other matters of life. But when brought into contact with it, when we go forth to the haunts and dens of London, and see with our own eyes, and hear with our own ears, then we begin to feel, and think, and know; and to marvel how it is that so much is done for the poor far-off savages, and so little, comparatively and effectually, for our own equally savage poor at home.

And, looking at our poors' rates, and the amounts given away daily and annually in charity, we wonder how it comes to pass that so much misery does or can exist; and we are compelled to acknowledge that the mere giving away of money will never stem distress. Real misery, for the most part, keeps itself in the background; it is your idle, undeserving vagabond who comes in for much of the bounty. And we are such a people for system, and committees, and overlookers—parish and otherwise—wrong though it all is for the most part—that a great deal, intended for distress, never gets near it at all. And so the world of London goes on: year by year charity multiplying; year by year poverty increasing, until it has now reached proportions so terrible and gigantic, that a thinking man shrinks from looking to the future. We

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cannot wonder at crime when much of it is created by misery : many falling into it wilfully, for no other purpose than to ensure themselves food and lodging—though it be a prison and prison fare—for at least a short space of their unhappy lives. Were the amount of money doubled that is yearly given away in charity, the probability is that, under the present order of things, the distress of London would be little, if any, less than it is. But into that great question—whether so much charity may not be a mistake—it is not the province of this short paper to enter. Enough that it deals with things as they are.

It is certain that the best mode of giving away alms is to do it personally, and so see that it goes into the right channels ; that it really relieves distress, and does not encourage vagabondism, or support a costly staff of numerous officials. But, of all who are disposed to give, probably but a small proportion of them could do this. Many are hindered by lack of time ; by other occupations ; many, alas, are not fitted for the work : for the gift—and it is a gift—of being able to visit the poor, is not so universally bestowed upon mankind, as some by their writings and preachings would lead us to imagine. The next important step, then, to self-visiting, is to find out those in a parish who give themselves up to this work, and conscientiously undertake the labour ; and help them with our purse, if we cannot with our time. And thirdly, an important duty devolving upon us, is to discover those institutions which have been established for the relief of destitution, and contribute our support to the most worthy of them, as far as we can.

Amongst these institutions the Soup-kitchens of London are worthy of taking high rank. The amount of distress they relieve can only be realized by a personal visit to one or all of them. The visit will be worth a little time and trouble, for the impression made will not be easily forgotten.

The one we wish specially to call attention to in this paper is situated in the very heart of the metropolis, and in that portion where wealth and poverty, both in extreme, are such near neighbours that they seem to be running together a perpetual hand-in-hand race. Yet the wealth increases, and the misery does not diminish. Leicester Square Soup-Kitchen takes its name from the fact of its having originally been founded in that locality, in 1840, by Mr. Charles Cochrane, who one time contested the City of Westminster. But, the premises being large and costly, it was subsequently removed to its present position, a small place leading out of Great Windmill Street, W., rejoicing in the not inappropriate name of Ham Yard. A few days since I chanced to pay the place a visit, and I would recommend others to do the same : the whole thing is open to public inspection, and visitors are treated with invariable courtesy and civility. It was about half-past two in the day, and the Yard was then filling with a crowd of half-starved men and women, betraying all the signs of misery. But they were orderly, with a subdued,

hushed quietness that told how much they needed the food for which they were waiting. And it was enough to make the heart ache, and the eye dim, to see that a large number of those assembled would have to be sent away empty : to depart with their fast unbroken, after standing there, some for one hour, some for two, some for more, in the bare hope of being relieved. Fifty eyes, greedy and glaring with hunger, were at once turned upon me, with a question more plainly put than if words had spoken it : "Have you a ticket to give us?" I hastened to the side door, and passed through the kitchen up to the secretary's room, where we remained until a few moments before three. We then returned together to the kitchen. Bowls filled with soup and bread, well thickened, were ranged round two or three tables running along the walls. I tasted some of the soup from one of the coppers, in a large wooden spoon used for stirring, and can vouch for its being so palatable, that a meal from it would be no hardship to some of us, who have no great hunger to assuage. On one side, in a sort of open stand, were some loaves and a large quantity of dry crusts, the latter obtained every morning from some of the clubs of London. But I wondered whether even poverty would be thankful for these doubly-dry remnants. Exactly at three the bar was withdrawn, and as many admitted, one by one, as soup was prepared for. This number varies according to the season of the year : on this particular day it was low, the whole number admitted not being above thirty. Those nearest the door with tickets had the preference : they walked in, and when all were seated, composed a motley group ; chiefly men, but a few women ; the men, being the strongest, could push their way to the front. It was a sight, to watch the faces of the men as they disposed of the soup, given to them at that degree of heat which prevented them from swallowing it too rapidly. The first to finish off the contents of a bowl—each bowl holding about a pint and a half—was a small child—a girl—the only child present. It disappeared so quickly, in spite of the heat, that involuntarily I glanced under the table ; but no, the little throat had managed to perform a greater wonder than the larger ones. Next in the catalogue came a huge, thin specimen of humanity, unmistakably Irish ; as soon as his bowl was disposed of he cast longing glances towards the coppers, and would evidently have liked it replenished ; but this is not permitted ; and indeed, from the size of the bowls, it is scarcely necessary. One such meal a day would keep a man at any rate from starvation.

Whilst this eating was in process, others came in with jugs and bags, provided with family tickets. They entered in a quiet, slow-moving stream, for the most part women ; and if the eating men had in any way excited compassion, these aroused it tenfold. I could but compare the string to a death procession, so pallid and woe-begone were, for the most part, its members. Many of them looked all but starved ; most of

them were too scantily clothed to keep out even the edge of the cold: poor, wretched women, with the glitter of hunger in their eyes, the gnawing worm of disease in their cheeks; living a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice, perhaps for the sake of their starving young ones at home. Involuntarily a cry rose up within me, and a wonder why the Almighty should permit this fearful misery upon His creatures. And then came the recollection of the curse, and I felt that it was here, visibly, in full force. The heart yearned to relieve this despair, but felt itself powerless. One man in the procession looked at death's very door; I have never seen a more perfect specimen of a living skeleton; yet there was an odour of respectability about his seedy black clothes, and quiet motions, that suggested better days. I pointed him out to the secretary.

"Ah," he replied, "I have seen him here for some time past. Some days he is successful, others he has to go away empty. He is a respectable man, but through no fault of his has fallen into extreme poverty: as you surmise, he has known much better days." The crusts had all this time been disappearing, received with a thankfulness that set all doubt on the score of their dryness at rest. The man, having got his jug filled, opened a large sack that would have held a hundred-weight and two platefuls were shovelled into it, with which he went away. But the look of despair seemed fixed; the eyes had not brightened for one moment at the sight of the soup; his load of care seemed too heavy to give place to even a gleam at the temporary relief. Those lines which have been so often quoted since they were written rushed into my mind, and I wished that some who have never remembered them to profit could have been present then.

"I drank of the richest wines,
And ate whatever is good,
Fish and flesh, and fowl and fruit,
Supplied my hungry mood;
But I never remember'd the wretched ones
That starved for want of food."

Before the in-pouring stream had ended—alas! long before all had been satisfied—the coppers were declared empty, and the distribution was over for that day. The manager counted out those within the kitchen whose jugs and bags were unfilled—eighteen. Eighteen poor, hungry beings, with tickets in their hands, and starving children at home, to be sent away! and some of them had met with the same fate yesterday! A few looked sullen with disappointment, others heart-broken; all stood still for a little, hoping against hope—as if the coppers would re-fill themselves by a special miracle—as if it were too terrible to be true that they must go away, empty-handed as they had come. Meanwhile, the word was given outside, and a wailing shout of disappointment arose from a large body of eager, waiting men. They were no doubt sick with hunger; but there was nothing for it but to move off, unsatisfied, from their long watch. And the number was greater

than was the number of those who had been successful. When all had departed, and the doors were again closed, there was heard a quiet tap at one of them; it got no response, and was again repeated. They opened the door then, and a lad of about fourteen presented himself to view; in speech, look, and dress, almost a gentleman. He seemed, and probably felt himself, too much apart from the crowd to endeavour to push his way in with them.

"What brings a boy like you, here?" asked the manager.

"I want some soup," was the reply.

"Why did you not come at the proper time?"

The boy hung his head, as if not liking to confess the true reason. "I have been waiting the whole morning," he answered at length, in a low tone, "in the hope of getting something."

"Then you should have come sooner. The soup's all gone. But where are your friends?" continued the manager; "what brings a boy of your appearance asking for soup?"

"I have no friends," was the answer. "Only my father, who is ill." And not liking to be questioned, perhaps, he looked down again, and began to beat with his foot.

"Well," replied the manager, "I'm sorry for you, but there's nothing left." It was true enough, for the sides and bottoms of the coppers had been well scraped for the last woman. "Come to-morrow." And the lad had to go away with the words ringing in his ears, the hope they suggested his only consolation.

And this is a constant experience: this sad scene occurs day after day; until those whose business it is to attend to it become, happily for them, hardened and callous by familiarity.

Besides the soup-kitchen there is a night refuge, with accommodation for fifteen people. Three rooms of five beds each; two for men, one for women. The lowest and dirtiest are not admitted. The entrance hour is nine o'clock, and to each person is given supper, bed, and breakfast. There is a lavatory also attached to the place, and any one in the morning desirous of a good wash, may turn in and make himself clean and respectable, free of all charge, and it is a boon of which hundreds avail themselves. Many of the poor are dirty from force of circumstance rather than from choice. Cleanliness is implanted in the nature of most men and women, and its very effect upon the moral character is such that I believe crime would be less prevalent than it is, if soap and water were only more accessible. The rooms, for what they are, are comfortable. It would have been a pleasure to see a little more clothing upon the beds, but everything was as clean and in good order as could be expected. "It is astonishing," said the manager, "the class of people we sometimes get here." Many have been most respectable; some, now and then, downright gentlemen. "Ah! sir,"—with a sigh that would have done credit to a giant—"it's a true saying.

—one half the world doesn't know how the other half lives. But I fancy there are few people really believe that men who have once been gentlemen ever do come down to this state. They hear of such cases, but listen as they would to some story-book ; they treat it as romance ; but it is true for all that. Ay ! and the cases are of more frequent occurrence than even I, with my experience, have supposed."

"Are you always full at night?"

"It depends very much upon the time of year. In cold weather we could do with many more beds if we had them. It is a pity there is not an institution of this kind on a more gigantic scale. If people gave their money to found such places, they would be doing far more good than in letting it go as it does—one hardly knows where. Some of the night refuges in London are perfect abominations ; the work-houses are abuses ; I do not wonder that they are hated and shunned."

"On the other hand," I remarked, "if they were made too comfortable ——"

He burst out laughing, and then shook his head. "When that takes place, sir, we may expect the sun to fall from heaven."

Most likely he spoke truth. Nothing of this kind ever is overdone. Upon one thing we were both agreed—that the soup-kitchen is a great boon, with the smallest possible amount of abuse attaching to it. Some evil must invariably be mixed with the good : nothing can be perfect. But half a loaf is better than no bread. It is our duty—God having given us abundance—to relieve misery, even when self-wrought ; and it is not for us to pass judgment. Enshrined in our great blessings, let us put this question to ourselves—are they not far more than we deserve ? "I thank God," said a great divine, upon seeing a criminal led out to execution, "not that I am better than that man, but that I have been kept from his temptations." He understood human nature, and knew how much was due to the force of circumstances ; to example, and association, and training. Many of our poor possess nothing of this : the marvel is that they grow up as good as they are.

The Leicester Square Soup-kitchen is a great boon ; we repeat it emphatically. Just now its funds are at a very low ebb—lower than they have been for very long ; for it is supported entirely by voluntary contributions. Anything in the shape of help, be it great or small, would be gladly received by Mr. Hobson, the secretary. Since 1853 it has never been closed for a single day—for it gives its supplies all the year round—and yet, a short while ago, it was feared they would have, for a little while, at any rate, to cease. In wintry weather, with the frost and snow on the ground, as many as a thousand a day are sometimes relieved. Let us give it aid, that it may flourish throughout this and many ensuing winters—that it may relieve many a soul from the pangs of hunger and cold, and so help to tide them on to that better time which is always coming !

When we sit at our well-spread table on Christmas day, and wish each other a Merry Christmas, may we remember to practical profit those of our fellow-creatures crowding, even then, round the soup-kitchen. God sees all. And the Saviour has said, The poor ye have with you always.

CHRISTMAS, 1869.

CHRISTMAS CAROLS.

THE children sung a song this Christmas morning,
Mellow and clear, outside my chamber door,
Waking me softly from my pleasant dreaming
Of unforgotten Christmas days of yore.

Sweetly they sung, my neighbour's happy children,
Two merry girls and one glad-hearted boy,
Repeating oft their song's rejoicing burden,—
“On Christmas morn the angels sing for joy!”

Sweetly they sung; but ah! their cheerful voices
Broke up my soul's deep founts of hidden woe;
And pressing down my face against the pillow,
I let the bitter torrent overflow.

Missing the little child that warbled softly
Two years ago to-day a song like this,
And when the joyful melody was ended,
Held up her sweet mouth for a Christmas kiss.

Only one Christmas Eve my fair-eyed darling
Lisp'd of dear Santa Claus her dreams among;
Only one Christmas morn, white-robed and joyful—
Lifted her clear voice in a Christmas song.

I see her little figure standing tiptoe,
To hang her dainty stocking on the wall;—
O sinless heart! O perfect faith of childhood,
Believing everything and trusting all!

Peace, aching heart! O let me trust entirely,
With faith and strength that nothing can destroy,
That my sweet baby is among the angels,
Who, on this Christmas morning, sing for joy!

DAVID GARTH'S NIGHT-WATCH.

THEY have been asking for a ghost-story. Just because I told one last Christmas people suppose I can tell another this. As if ghosts could be had to order, and we kept a stock on hand! I can't do it. What I can tell, though, is nearly as good as a ghost, and mysterious enough.

We were at Crabb Cot. The leaves were falling late that year, for November was nearly half through, and they strewed the ground in shoals. But if the leaves were late, the frost was early. The weather had come in curiously cold. Three days before the morning I'm going to speak of, the warm weather suddenly changed to a biting cold; it had gone on increasing, and was now as freezing as January. It's not often you see ice mingling with the dead leaves of autumn. Both the ice and the leaves have to do with the thing that happened: and I think you often find that if the weather is very unusually out of the common, we get something to remember it by in the future.

Crabb Ravine, as you have heard, had its beginning beyond that three-cornered grove of trees opposite the store-barn. At the corner of a field, about midway between this lively spot and North Crabb, stood a small dwelling, called Willow Brook Cottage: but the brook from which it took its name was dry now. You could see the grove and descent to the Ravine from its back, and the houses of North Crabb from its face: but it had a lonely look, for all that—and perhaps that kept it empty. It had been unoccupied for more than a year, when the Squire, tired of seeing it so, happened to say in the hearing of James Hill that he would let it for almost a nominal rent. Hill snapped at the words and said he would be glad to rent it: for some cause or other he did not like the one he was in, and had been wanting to leave it. At least, he said this: but he was of a frightfully stingy turn, and we all thought the low rent prompted him. Hill was the working bailiff: a steady man, but severe upon everybody.

It was during this early frost that he was beginning to move in. One morning after breakfast, I was taking the broad pathway across the fields to North Crabb, which led close by Willow Cottage, and saw Hill wheeling a small-sized truck up with some of his household goods in it. He was a tall, strong man, and the cold was tolerably sharp, but the load had warmed him to a glowing heat.

"Good morning, Master Johnny."

"Making ready for the flitting, Hill?"

Hill wheeled the truck to the door, and sat down on one of its handles while he wiped his face. It was an honest, cross face; red habitually. The house had a good large garden on its side, enclosed by wooden palings; with a shut-in shed and some pigstyes at the back. Lots of trees overshadowed the palings: their fallen leaves making, just now, a border to the garden ankle-deep inside and out.

"A fine labour I shall have, to get the place into order!" cried Hill, pointing to some broken palings and the over-grown branches. "Don't think but what the Squire has got the best bargain, after all!"

"You'd say that, Hill, if he gave you a house rent-free."

Hill took the key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and we went in. This lower room was boarded; the kitchen was at the back; above were two fair-sized chambers. One of them looked to Crabb Ravine; the other was only lighted from above—by a skylight in the roof.

"You have had fires here, Hill!"

"I had 'em in every room all day yesterday, sir, and am going to light 'em again now. My wife said it must be; and she warn't far wrong; for a damp house plays the mischief with one's bones. The fools that women be, to be sure!—and my wife's the worst of 'em."

"What has your wife done?"

"She had a bit of an accident yesterday, Master Johnny. A coming out with a few things for this place, she stepped upon some ice, and fell; it gave her ankle a twist, and she had to be helped home. I'm blest if she's not a-saying now that it's a ill-omen! Because she can't get about and help to shift the things in here, she says we shan't have nothing but ill-luck in the place."

I had heard already of the ankle-twist. Hill's wife was a little shrinking woman, mild and gentle, quite superior to him. She was a widow when he married her, a Mrs. Garth, with one son, David. Miss Timmens, the schoolmistress at North Crabb, was her sister. On the previous morning a letter had come from Worcester, saying their mother, Mrs. Timmens, was taken dangerously ill, and asking them to go over. Miss Timmens went; Hill refused his wife's going: how could he get along at moving-time without her? he demanded. She cried and implored, but Hill was harder than flint. She had to remain at home, and set about her preparations for removal. In starting out with the first lot of moveables—a few things carried in her arms—the accident occurred. So that, for the helping to move, she was useless; and the neighbours, ever ready to take part in a matrimonial grievance, said it served Hill right. Any way, it did not improve his temper.

"When do you get in here, Hill?"

"To-morrow, Master Johnny, please the pigs. But for the wife's awkwardness we'd ha' been in to-day. As to any help Davvy could give, it's worth no more nor a rat's; he haven't got much more strength in him nor one, neither. Drat the boy!"

Leaving Hill to his task, I went on; and in passing Mrs. Hill's dwelling I thought I'd give a look in to see how the ankle was. The cottage stood by itself, just as this other one did, but was less lonely. Davy's voice called out, "Come in."

He was the handiest little fellow possible for any kind of housework—or for sewing either; but not half strong enough or rough enough for a boy. His soft brown eyes had a shrinking tenderness in them, his face looked delicate as a girl's, and his light hair hung in curls. But he was a little bit deformed in the back—some called it only a stoop of the shoulders—and, though fourteen, might have been taken for ten. The boy's love for his mother was something good. They had lived at Worcester, she having a small income, where he had been well brought up. When she married Hill—all her friends were against it—of course they had to come to North Crabb; but Davy was not happy. A timid lad always, he could not overcome his first fear of Hill. Not that the man was unkind, only rough and resolute.

Davy was washing up the breakfast things; his mother sat by, sorting out the contents of a chest: a neat little woman in a green stuff gown, with the same sweet eyes as David's and the shrinking look in them. She left off when I went in, and said her ankle was no worse.

"It's a pity it happened just now, Mrs. Hill."

"I'd have given a great deal for it not to, sir. They call me foolish, I know; always have done; but it just seems to me like a bad omen. I had got a few articles in my arms, the first trifles we'd begun to move, and down I fell on going out at this door. To me it seems nothing but a warning that we ought not to move in to Willow Cottage."

David had halted with his tea-cups, his brown eyes fixed approvingly on his mother. That it was not the first time he had listened to the superstition and that he was every whit as bad as she, might be plainly seen.

"I have never liked the thought of that new place from the first, Master Johnny. It's as if something held me back from it. Hill, he keeps saying that it's a convenient dwelling, and dirt-cheap; and so it is: but I don't like the notion of it. No more does David."

"Oh, I dare say you'll like it when you get in, Mrs. Hill; and David too."

"It's to be hoped so, sir."

The day went on; and its after-events I can only speak of from hearsay. Hill moved in a good portion of his goods, David carrying some of the light things. Luke Macintosh was asked to go and sleep in the house that night as a safeguard against thieves, but he flatly refused, unless somebody slept there with him. Hill ridiculed him for his cowardice; and finally agreed that David should bear him company.

He made the bargain without his wife. She had other views for David. Her intention was to send the lad over to Worcester by the

seven o'clock evening train; not so much because his bed and bedding had been carried off and there was nothing to sleep on, but that his dying grandmother had expressed a wish to see him. To hear then that David was not to go, did not please Mrs. Hill.

It was David himself who carried in the news. She had the tea waiting on the table when they came in: David first; for his step-father had stopped to speak to somebody in the road.

"But David, dear—you *must* go to Worcester," she said, when he told her.

"He'll never let me, mother," was David's whispered answer. "He says the things might be stolen if nobody takes care of them: and Macintosh is afraid to be there alone."

She paused and looked at him, a thought striking her. The boy was leaning upon her in his fond manner, his hand in hers.

"Should you be afraid, David?"

"Not—I think—with Luke. We are to be in the same room."

But Mrs. Hill noticed that his voice was hesitating; that his small weak hand trembled in hers. There was not a more morally brave heart than David Garth's; he had had a religious training; but at being alone in the dark he was a very coward, afraid of ghosts and goblins.

"Hill," said she to her husband when he stamped in, wiping his shoes, the lad having gone then to wash his hands, "I can't let David sleep in the other house to-night. He'll be too timid."

"Timid!" repeated Hill, staring at the words. "Why, Luke Macintosh will be with him."

"David won't like it. Macintosh is nothing but a coward himself."

"Don't thee be a fool, and show it," returned rough Hill. "Thee'll keep that boy a baby for his life. Davvy would as soon sleep in the house alone as not, but for the folly put into his head by you. And why not? He's fourteen."

Hill—to give him his due—only spoke as he thought. That any one in the world, grown to fourteen and upwards, could be truly afraid of sleeping in a house alone, was to him literally incomprehensible—a social phenomenon never to be understood.

"I said he must go over to Worcester to see mother, James," she meekly resumed; "you know I did."

"Well, he can't go to-night; he shall go in the morning. There! He may stop with her for a week, an' ye like, for all the good he's of to me."

"Mother's looking for him to-night, and he ought to go. The dying——"

"Now just you drop it, for he can't be spared," interrupted Hill.

"The goods might be stole, with all the loose characters there is about, and that fool of a Macintosh won't go in of himself. Davvy must keep him company—it's not so much he does for his keep—and he may start for Worcester by daylight."

Whenever Hill came down upon her with this resolute decision, it struck her timid forthwith. The allusion to the boy's keep was an additional stab ; for it was beginning to be rather a sore subject. An uncle at Worcester, who had no family and was well to do, had partly offered to adopt the lad ; but it was not settled yet. Davy was a great favourite with all the relatives ; Miss Timmens, the schoolmistress, doted on him. Mrs. Hill, not venturing on further remonstrance, made the best of the situation.

"Davy, you are to go to Worcester the first thing in the morning," she said, when he came back from washing his hands : "so as soon as you've been home and had a bit o' breakfast, you shall run off to the train."

The tea over, Hill went out on some business, saying he should be in at eight, or thereabouts, to go with Davy to the cottage. As the hour drew near, David, sitting over the fire with his mother in pleasant talk, as they loved to do, asked if he should read before he went : for her habit was to read in the Bible to him, or cause him to read to her, the last thing.

"Yes, dear," she said. "Read the ninety-first Psalm."

So David read it. Closing the book when it was over, he sat with it on his knee, thoughtfully.

"If we could but see the angels, mother ! It is so difficult to remember always that they are close around, taking care of us."

"So it is, Davy. Most of us forget it."

"When life's over it will be so pleasant for them to carry us away to Heaven ! I wish you and I could go together, mother."

"We shall each go when God pleases, David."

"Oh, yes, I know that."

Mrs. Hill, remembering this little bit of conversation word for word repeated it afterwards to me and others, with how they had sat, and David's looks. I tell this for fear people might think I invented it.

Hill came in, and they prepared to go to the other house. David, his arms full—for, of course, with things to be carried, they did not go empty-handed—came suddenly back from the door in going out, flung his load down, and clasped his mother. She bent to kiss him.

"Good night, my dear one ! Don't you and Luke get chattering all night. Go to sleep betimes."

He burst into tears, clinging to her with trembling sobs. It was as if his heart were breaking.

"Are you afraid to go ?" she whispered.

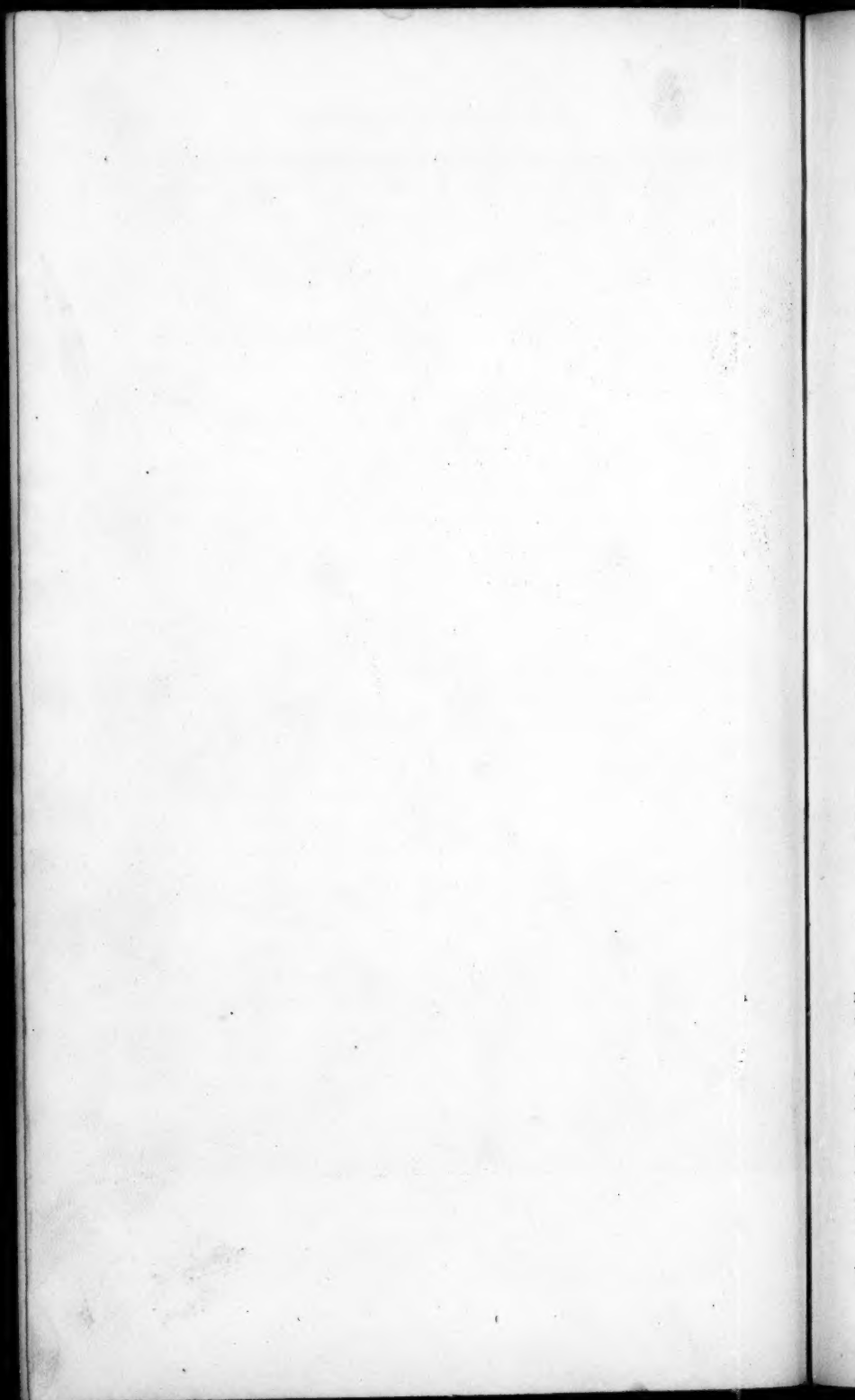
"I must go," was his sobbing answer.

"Now then, Davvy !" called back Hill's rough tones, "what the plague are you lagging for ?"

"Say good-bye to me, mother ! Say good-bye !"



Jim Batley tries to awake David.



"Good bye, and God bless you, David! Remember the angels are around you!"

"I know; I know!"

Catching up his bundles, he departed, keeping some paces behind Hill all the way; partly to hide his face, down which the tears were raining; partly in his customary awe of that formidable functionary who stood to him as a step-father.

Arrived at the house, Hill was fumbling for the key, when some one came darting forth from under the shadow of its eaves. It proved to be Luke Macintosh.

"I was a-looking round for you," said crusty Hill. "I began to think you'd forgot the time o' meeting."

"No, I'd not forgot it; but I've come to say that I can't oblige you by sleeping there," was Luke's reply. "The master have ordered me off with the waggon afore dawn, and so—I'm a-going to sleep at home."

Had I been there, I could have said the master had *not* ordered Luke off before dawn; but after his breakfast. It was just a ruse of his, to avoid doing what he had never relished, the sleeping in the house. Hill suspected as much, and went on at him finely, mockingly asking if he was afraid to see a hobgoblin. Luke dodged away in the midst of it, and Hill relieved his passion by a little hot language.

"Come along, Davvy," said he, at last; "we must put these here things inside."

Unlocking the door, he went in; and, the first thing, fell against something or other in the darkness. Hill swore a little at that, and struck a light, the fire having gone out. This lower room was full of articles, thrown down out of hand; for the putting things straight was left to the morrow.

"Carry the match afore me, Davvy. These blankets must go upstairs."

By some oversight no candles had been taken to the house; only the box of matches. David lighted one after the other, while Hill arranged the blankets on the mattress for sleeping. This room—the one that had the skylight—was to be David's.

"There," said Hill, taking the box of matches from him, "you'll be comfortable here till morning. If you find it cold, you might keep on your trousers."

David Garth stood speechless, a look of horror struggling to his face. In that first moment he dared not remonstrate; his awe of Hill was too great.

"What's the matter now?" asked Hill, striking another match. "What ails you?"

"You'll not leave me here, all by myself?" whispered the unhappy boy, in desperate courage.

"Not leave you here by yourself! Why, what d'ye think is to harm you? Don't you try on your nonsense and games with me, Master Davvy. I'm not soft, like your mother. Say your prayers and get to sleep, and I'll come and let you out in the morning."

By a dexterous movement, Hill got outside, and closed the door softly, slipping the bolt. The match in his fingers was nearly spent; but, nevertheless, it had shown a last faint vision of a boy kneeling in supplication, his hands held out, his face one of piteous agony. As Hill struck another match to light up the staircase, a wailing cry mingled with the sound: entreaties to be let out; prayers not to be left alone; low moans, telling of awful terror.

"Drat the boy! This comes of his mother's coddling. Hold your row, Davy," he roared out, wrathfully: "you'd not like me to come back and give you a basting."

And Mr. James Hill, picking his way over the bundles, locked the outer door, and betook himself home. That was our bailiff. What do you think of him?

"Did you leave Davy comfortable?" asked Mrs. Hill, when he got back.

"He'll be comfortable enough when he's asleep," sullenly answered Hill. "Of all hardened, ungrateful boys, that of yourn's the worst."

"Had Luke come when you got there?" she resumed, passing over the aspersion on Davy.

"He was waiting: he come right out upon us like an apparition," was Hill's evasive answer. And he did not tell the rest.

But now, a singular thing happened that night. Mrs. Hill was in a sound sleep, when a loud, agonised cry of "Mother" aroused her from it. She started up, wide awake instantly, and in terror so great that the perspiration began to pour off her face. In that moment the call was repeated again. The voice was David's voice; it had appeared to be in the room, close to her, and she peered into every corner in vain. Then she supposed it must have come through the window: that David, from some cause or other, had come home from Willow Brook, and was waiting to be let in. A dread crossed her of Hill's anger, and she felt inclined to order the boy to go back again.

Opening the casement window, she called to him by name; softly at first, and then louder. There was no answer. Mrs. Hill stretched out her head as far as the narrow casement allowed, but neither David nor anybody else could she see; nothing but the shadows cast by the moonlight. Just then the old church clock struck out. She counted the strokes, and found it twelve. Midnight. It was bitterly cold: she closed the window at last, concluding David had gone off for fear of being punished. All she could hope was that he would have the sense, that dangerously keen night, to run off to the brick kilns, and get warmth there.

But the mortal terror lay upon her yet ; she was unable to tell why or wherefore ; unless from the strangely appealing agony contained in the cry ; still less could she shake it off. It seemed odd. Hill awoke with the commotion, and found her shaking.

"What have ye got to be affrighted on?" he asked, roughly, when she had told her tale. And Mrs. Hill was puzzled to say what.

"You had been a-dreaming of him, that's what it was. You've got nothing else in your mind, day nor night, but that there boy."

"It was not a dream ; I am quite positive it was himself ; I couldn't mistake his voice," persisted Mrs. Hill. "He has come away from the cottage, for sure. Perhaps that Luke Macintosh might have got teasing him."

Knowing what Hill knew, he could safely have stood out that the boy could not have come away from it ; but he said no more. Rolling himself round, he prepared to go to sleep again, resentful at having been woke up.

Hill overslept himself in the morning ; possibly through the interruption to his rest. When he went out it was broad daylight. David Garth's being locked up half an hour more or less went for nothing with Hill, and he stayed to load the truck with some of the remainder of his goods.

"Send Davy home at once, Hill," called out the wife, as he began to wheel it away. "I'll give him his breakfast and let him start off to the train."

For, with the daylight, and the sight of the door-key, Mrs. Hill could only reverse her opinion, and conclude unwillingly that it might have been a dream. Hill showed her the key, telling her that he had locked the door "for safety." Therefore, it appeared to be an impossibility that David could have got out.

The first thing Hill saw when he and his truck approached the cottage, was young Jim Batley, mounted on the roof and hammering away at the skylight with his freezing hands. Jim, a regular sailor for climbing, had climbed a tree and thence swung himself on to the tiles. Hill treated him to some hard words and ordered him to come down and get a licking. Down came Jim ; taking care to dodge out of Hill's reach.

"I can't make David hear," said Jim. "I've got to go to Timberdale, and I want him to go along with me."

"That's no reason why you should get atop o' my roof," roared Hill. "You look out for a sweet hiding, young Jim. The first time I get hold on you, you shall have it kindly."

"He sleeps uncommon hard," said Jim. "One 'ud think the cold had froze him. I've got to take a letter to my uncle's at Timberdale: we shall find a jolly good hot breakfast when we get there."

Hill condescended to abate his anger so far as to inform Jim Batley

that David could not go to Timberdale; adding that he was going off by train to see his grandmother at Worcester. Ordering Jim to take himself off, he unlocked the door and entered the cottage.

Jim Batley chose to stay. He was a tall, thin, obstinate fellow of eleven, and meant to wait and speak to David. Given to follow his own way, whenever he could, in spite of his father and mother, it occurred to him that perhaps David might be persuaded to take Timberdale first and the train after.

He amused himself amid the dead leaves while he waited. But it seemed that David took a long while dressing himself. The truck stood at the door; Jim stamped and whistled; and shied a few stones at the topmost article, which was Mrs. Hill's potato saucepan. Presently Hill came out and began to unload; beginning with the saucepan.

"Where's Davy?" demanded Jim, from a safe distance. "Ain't he ready yet?"

"Now if you don't get off about your business I'll make you go," was Hill's answer, keeping his back turned to the boy. "You haven't got nothing to stop for here."

"I'm stopping to speak to Davy."

"Davy was away out o' here afore daylight and took the first train to Worcester. He's there a'most by now."

Young boys are not clever reasoners; but certain odds and ends of contradictions passed through Jim's disappointed mind. For one thing, he had seen Hill unlock the door.

"I don't think he's gone out yet. I see his boots."

"What boots?" asked Hill, putting a bandbox inside the door.

"Davy's. I see 'em through the skylight; they stood near the tail o' the mattress."

"Them was a pair o' my boots as I carried here last night. I tell ye Davvy's *gone*: can't ye believe? He won't be home for some days neither, for his grandmother's safe to keep him."

Jim Batley went slowly off on his way to Timberdale: there was nothing to stay for, Davy being gone. Happening to turn round, he caught Hill looking after him, and saw his face for the first time. It had turned as white as death. The contrast was very remarkable, from its being usually of a deep red.

"Well, I never!" cried Jim, halting in surprise. "Mayhap the cold have took him! Serve him right."

When Hill had got all the things inside he locked himself in, probably not to be disturbed while he arranged them. Mrs. Hill had been waiting breakfast ever so long when she heard the truck coming back.

"Whatever's become of David?" she began. "I expected him home at once."

"David has started for Worcester," said Hill.

"Started for Worcester! Without his breakfast?"

"Now don't you worry yourself about petty things," returned Hill, crustily. "You wanted him to go, and he's gone. He won't starve; let him alone for that."

The notion assumed by Mrs. Hill was, that her husband had started the boy off from the cottage direct to the train. She felt thoroughly vexed.

"He had got all his old clothes on, Hill. I'd not have had him go to Worcester in that plight for any money. You might have let the child come home for a bit of breakfast—and to dress himself. There was not so much as a brush and comb at the place, to brush his hair tidy."

"There's no pleasing you," growled Hill. "Last night you were a'most in a tantrum o' crying, cause Davvy couldn't be let go over to see your mother; and, now that he is gone, *that* don't please ye! Women be the very deuce for grumbling."

Mrs. Hill dropped the subject—there could be no remedy—and gave her husband his breakfast in silence. Hill seemed to eat nothing, and looked very pale; at moments ghastly.

"Don't you feel well?" she asked.

"Well?—I'm well enough. What should ail me—barring the cold? It's as sharp a frost as ever I was out in."

"Drink this," she said, pouring him out another cup of hot tea. "It is cold; and I'm sorry we've got it for our moving. What time shall we get in to-day, Hill?"

"Not at all."

"Not at all!" repeated the wife in surprise.

"No, not at all," was Hill's surly confirmation. "What with you disabled, and Davvy o' no use, things is not as forrard as they ought to be. I've got to be off to my work too, pretty quick, or the Squire'll be about me. We shan't get in till to-morrow."

"But nearly all our things are in," she remonstrated. "There's as good as nothing left here."

"I tell ye we don't go in afore to-morrow," said Hill, giving the table a thump. "Can't you be satisfied with that?"

He went off to his work. Mrs. Hill, accepting the change as inevitable, resigned herself to it, and borrowed a saucepan to cook the potatoes for dinner. She might have spared herself the trouble; since her husband did not come in for any. He bought a penny loaf and some cheese, and made his dinner of it inside our yellow barn, Molly giving him some beer. He had done it before when very busy; but the work he was about that day was in no such hurry, and he might have left it if he would.

"Who is to sleep in the house to-night?" his wife asked him when he got home to tea.

"I shall," said Hill. "I won't be beholden to nobody."

Mrs. Hill, remembering the experience of the past night, quaked a little at finding she should have to sleep in the old place alone, devoutly praying there might be no recurrence of the dream that had put her into such mortal terror. She and Davy were just alike—frightened at their own shadows in the dark. When Hill was safe off, she scuttered into bed, and kept her head under the clothes.

Hill came back betimes in the morning; and they moved in at once; old Coney's man, who happened to be out with the dog-cart, offering to drive Mrs. Hill. Though her ankle was better and the distance short, she could hardly have walked. Instead of finding the house in order, as she expected, it was all at sixes and sevens; the things lying about all over it.

Towards evening, Hannah got me to call at Willow Brook and say she'd go there in the morning for an hour or two, to help put things in order—the mistress had said she might. The fact was, Hannah was burning for the gossip: she and Hill's wife being choice friends. It was nearly dark; the front room looked tolerably straight, and Mrs. Hill sat by the fire, resting her foot and looking out at the window, for company, the shutters not yet shut.

"I'd be very thankful for her to come, Master Johnny," she said eagerly, hardly letting me finish. "There's a great deal to do; and, besides that, it is so lonesome here. I never felt such a feeling in all my life; and I've gone into strange homes before this."

"It does seem lonesome, somehow. The fancy may go off in a day or two."

"I don't know, sir: it's to be hoped it will. Master Johnny, as true as that we are sitting here, when I got out of Mr. Coney's dog-cart and put my foot over the threshold to enter, a fit of tremor took me all over. There was no cause for it: I mean I was not thinking of anything to give it me. Not a minute before, I was laughing; for the man had been telling me a joking story of something that happened yesterday at his master's. A strange fear seemed to come upon me all at once as I stepped over the threshold, and I began to shake from head to foot. Hill stared at me and asked if it was the cold: I told him truly that I didn't know what it was; except that it seemed like some unaccountable attack, and that I was well wrapped up. He had got some brandy in a bottle, and he made me drink a drop. The shaking fit went off; but I have had a queer lonesome feeling on me ever since, as if the house was not one to be alone in."

"And you have been alone, I suppose?"

"Every bit of the time, save when Hill came in to his dinner. I don't remember ever to have had such a feeling before in the broad daylight. It's just as if the house was haunted."

Not believing in haunted houses, I laughed. Mrs. Hill got up to

stir the fire ; it burst into a blaze, and cast her shadow upon the opposite yellow-washed wall.

"When dusk came on, I could hardly bear it. But for your coming in, Master Johnny, I should have stood at the door in the cold, and watched for Hill : things don't feel so lonely to one out of doors as in."

So it seemed that I was in for a stay—any way, till Hill arrived. After this, it wouldn't have been over kind to leave her to herself : she looked so weak and little.

"I've never liked the thought of moving here from the first," she went on ; "and then there came the accident to my foot. Some people think nothing at all of omens, Master Johnny, but I do. They come oftener than is thought for too, only so few take notice of them. I wish Davy was back ! I can't bear to be in this house alone."

"David is at Worcester, I heard Hill say."

"He went yesterday morning, sir. I expected a letter from him to-day ; and it is very curious that none has come. Davy knew how anxious I was about mother ; and he never fails to write when he's away from me. Somehow, all things are going crooked and cross just now. I got a fright the night before last, Master Johnny, and I've hardly got quit of it yet."

"What was that ?" I asked her.

She stared into the fire for a minute or two before she answered me. There was no other light in the room ; I sat back against the wall beside the window—whose shutters were still open.

"You might not care to hear it, sir."

"I should if it's worth telling."

Turning from the fire, she looked straight at me while she told it—told it from the beginning to the end, exactly as I've written it above. The tale would have been just the thing for Mrs. Todhetley, who went in for most kinds of marvels.

"Hill stood to it that it was a dream, Master Johnny ; but the more I think of it, the less I believe it could have been one. If I had only heard the call in my sleep, or in the moment of waking, why of course it might have been a dream ; but when I heard it the second time it was *after* I awoke. I heard it as plain as I hear my own voice now ; and plainer, too."

"But what else, except a dream, do you fancy it could have been ?"

"Well, sir, that's what is puzzling me. But for Hill's convincing me Davy could not have got out of here after he had locked him and Macintosh in for safety, I should have said it was the boy himself, calling me from outside. It sounded to be in the room, close to me : but the fright I was in might have deceived me in that. 'Mother !' it sharply said : and the tone was one of the most awful distress I had ever heard. 'Mother !' it——"

A loud rapping at the window interrupted the climax. I am not ashamed to say that it startled me, coming so unexpectedly. Mrs. Hill screamed out a shrill scream, and darted forward to catch hold of my arm.

"Let me go. Somebody wants to be let in. I dare say it's Hill."

"Master Johnny, I beg your pardon," she said, falling back. "Hill ought to know better than to come frightening me at night like this."

I opened the door, and Miss Timmens walked in: not Hill. The knocking had not been intended to frighten anybody, she said, but as a greeting to Mrs. Hill—seen in front of her through the glass.

"You know you always were one of the quaking ones, Nanny," she said. "I've just got back from Worcester, and thought you'd like to hear that mother's better."

"And it's well you are back, Miss Timmens," I put in. "The school has been in chronic rebellion. Strangers, going by, have taken it for a bear-garden."

"That Maria Lease is just good for nothing," said Miss Timmens, wrathfully. "When she offered to take my place I knew she'd not be of much use. Yes, sir; it was the thought of the school that brought me back so soon."

"And mother is really better!" cried Mrs. Hill. "I am so thankful. If she had died and I not able to get over to her, I should never have forgiven myself. How's David?"

"Are you getting straight, Nanny?" asked Miss Timmens, looking round the room, and seemingly not noticing the question about David.

"Straight! and only moved in this morning! and me with this ankle! About David?" added Mrs. Hill; "I was so vexed that he went over in his old clothes! It was Hill's fault. Have you brought me a letter from him?"

"How could I bring you a letter from him?" returned Miss Timmens. "A letter from where?"

It was a minute or two before the elucidation came, for both were at cross-purposes. David Garth had not been to Worcester at all, so far as Miss Timmens knew; certainly not to his grandmother's.

To see Mrs. Hill sink back into her chair at this information, and let her hands fall on her lap, and gaze helplessly from her frightened eyes, was only to be expected. Miss Timmens kept asking what it all meant, and where David was, but she could get no answer. So I told her what Mother Hill had just told me—about Hill's sending him off to Worcester. She stared like anything.

"Why where in the name of wonder can the boy have got to?"

"I see it all," spoke the mother then, in a whisper. "Davy did find his way out of this house; and it was his voice I heard, and not a dream. I knew it. I knew it at the time."

The words would have sounded mysterious rather to any one given

to mystery. Miss Timmens was not. She was a long, thin female, with chronic spots of redness on her nose and one cheek, and as practical as could be. Demanding what Mrs. Hill meant by "not a dream," she stood warming her boots at the fire while she was enlightened.

"The boy is keeping away for fear of Hill's tanning him," spoke Miss Timmens, summing up the question. "Don't you think so, Master Ludlow?"

"I should, if I could see how he got out of the cottage here, after Hill had locked him in it."

"Luke Macintosh put him out at this window," said Miss Timmens, decisively. "Hill couldn't lock up that. They'd open the shutters, and Luke would pop him out: to get rid of the boy, no doubt. Mr. Luke ought to be punished for it."

I did not contradict her. Of course it might have been so; but knowing Luke, I didn't think he'd care to be left in the house alone. Unless—all at once the thought flashed over me—unless Luke sent away David, that he might be off himself. Amidst a good deal of mist, this view seemed the most probable.

"Where is David?" bemoaned Mrs. Hill, "where is he? And with these bitter cold nights——"

"Now don't you worry yourself, Nanny," interrupted strong-minded Miss Timmens. "I'll see to David; and bring him home, too."

The cough of Hill was heard outside. Miss Timmens—who had been in a dead rage at the marriage, and consequently hated Hill like poison—hastened to depart. We went away together, passing Hill by the dried brook. He looked stealthily at us, and answered back a surly good-night to me.

"I'm sure I don't know where I am to look for the boy first," began Miss Timmens, as we went along. "Poor fellow! he is keeping away out of fear. It would not surprise me if Macintosh is taking care of him. The man's not ill-natured."

"I don't understand why Hill should have told his mother David was gone to Worcester, unless he did go." Neither did I.

"David never went to Worcester, rely upon that, Master Ludlow," was her decisive answer. "He is well known at Shrub Hill Station, and I could not have failed to hear of it, for one of the porters lodges in mother's house; besides, David would have come down to us at once. Good night, sir. I dare say he will turn up before to-morrow."

She went on towards the school-house, I the other way to Crabb Cot. Mrs. Todhetley and the Squire were talking together by the blaze of fire, waiting until old Thomas came to say dinner was ready.

"Where have you been lingering this cold evening, Johnny?" began the Squire. "Don't you get trying the ponds, sir; the ice is not of more than wafer thickness."

Kneeling down on the rug between them, to hold my hands to the warmth, I told where I had been, and what I had heard. Mrs. Todhetley, who seemed to have been born with a sympathy for children, went into a lamentation over—it was what she said—that poor little gentle lamb, David.

"Macintosh is about somewhere," spoke the Squire, ringing the bell. "We will soon hear whether he knows what has become of the boy."

Thomas was ordered to find Macintosh and send him in. He came presently, shy and sheepish, as usual. Standing just inside the door, he blinked his eyes and rubbed his hands one over the other, like any idiot. It was only his way.

"Do you know where David Garth is?" began the Squire, who thought himself a regular Q.C. at cross-examination. Luke stared at the query, and said No. The fact was, he had not heard that David was missing.

"What time was it that you put him out of the window the night before last?"

Luke's eyes and mouth opened. He had no more idea what the Squire meant than the man in the moon.

"Don't stand there as if you were a born simpleton, but answer me," stamped the Squire. "When you and David Garth were put into Hill's new cottage to take care of the things for the night, how came you to let the boy out of it? Why did you do it? Upon what plea?"

"But I didn't do it, sir," said Luke.

"Now don't you stand there and say that to my face, Macintosh. It won't answer; for I know all about it. You put that poor shivering boy out at the window that you might be off yourself; that's about the English of it. Where did he go to?"

"But I couldn't do it, sir," was Luke's answer to this. "I warn't in the place myself."

"You were not there yourself?"

"No, sir, I warn't. Knowing I should have to go off with the waggon pretty early, I went down and telled Hill that I should sleep at home."

"Do you mean to say you did not go to Hill's place at all?"

"No, sir, I didn't. I conclude Hill slept there hisself. I know nothing about it, for I don't happen to have come across Hill since. I've kept out of his way."

This was a new turn to the affair. Luke quitted the room, and there came a silence. Mrs. Todhetley touched me on the shoulder.

"Johnny!"

"Yes!" I said, wondering at the startled look in her eyes.

"I hope Hill did not put that poor child into the house alone! If so, no wonder that he made his escape from it."

The matter could not rest. One talked and another talked : and before noon next day it was known all over the place that David Garth had been put to sleep by himself in the empty cottage. Miss Timmens attacked Hill with her strong tongue, and told him it was enough to frighten the child to death. Hill was sullen. He would answer nothing ; and all she could get out of him was, that it was no business of hers. In vain she demanded his grounds for saying the boy had gone to Worcester by the early train : whether he sent him—whether he saw him off? Hill said David did go ; and then took refuge in dogged silence.

The schoolmistress was not one to be played with. Of a tenacious turn, she followed out things with a will. She called in the police ; she harangued people outside her door ; she set the parish in a ferment. But David could not be heard of, high or low. Since the midnight hour, when that call, of his, awoke his mother, and was again repeated, he seemed to have vanished.

There arose a rumour that Jim Batley could tell something. Miss Timmens pounced upon him as he was going by the school-house, conveyed him indoors, and ordered him to make a clean breast of it. It was not much that Jim had to tell : but that little seemed of importance to Miss Timmens, and he told it readily. One thing Jim persisted in—that the boots he saw through the skylight must have been David's boots. Hill had called them his, but they were not big enough—not men's boots at all. Hill was looking "ghashly white," as if he had got a fright, Jim added, when he said David was gone off to Worcester.

Perhaps it was in that moment that a fear, of something worse than had been suspected yet, dawned upon Miss Timmens. Tying on her bonnet, she came up to Crabb Cot, and asked to see the Squire.

"It is getting more serious," she said, after old Thomas had shown her in. "I think, sir, Hill should be forced to explain what he knows I've come here to ask you to do it."

"The question is—what does he know?" rejoined the Squire.

"More than he has confessed," said Miss Timmens, in her positive manner. "Jim Batley stands to it that those boots must, from the size, have been David's boots. Now, Squire Todhetley, if David's boots were there, where was David? That is what's lying on my mind, sir."

"What did Jim Batley see besides the boots?" asked the Squire.

"Nothing in particular," she answered. "He said the cupboard door stood open, and hid the best part of the room. David would not be likely to run away and leave his boots behind him."

"Unless he was in too great a fright to stop and put them on."

"I don't think that, sir."

"What is it you wish to imply?" asked the Squire, not seeing the drift of the argument.

"I wish I knew myself," replied Miss Timmens, candidly. "I'm

certain Hill has not told all he could tell : he has been deceitful over it from the first, and he must be made to explain. Look here, sir : when he got to Willow Cottage that morning, there's no doubt he thought David was in. Very well. He goes in to call him ; stays a bit, and then comes out and tells young Jim that David had gone to Worcester. How was he to know David had gone?—who told him? The boy says, too, that Hill looked ghastly, as if he had been frightened."

"David must have gone somewhere, or he would have been in the room," argued the Squire. "He'd not be likely to go back after quitting it, and his mother heard him call to her in the middle of the night."

"Just so, sir. But—if Hill did not find him, why should he come out and assert that David had started for Worcester? It's the boots that come over me," vowed Miss Timmens ; "I can't come to the bottom of 'em. I mean to come to the bottom of Hill, though, and make him disclose what he knows. You are his master, sir, and perhaps he will tell you without trouble, if you'll be so good as question him. If he won't, I'll have him brought up before the Bench."

Away went Miss Timmens, with a parting remark that the school must be rampant by that time. The Squire sat thinking a bit, and then put on his hat and great-coat, telling me I might come with him and hear what Hill had to say. We expected to find Hill in the ploughed field between his cottage and North Crabb. But Hill was in his own garden ; we saw him as we went along. Without ceremony, the Squire opened the wooden gate and stepped in. Hill was raking the leaves together by the shed at the end of the garden.

He threw down the rake when he saw us, as if startled, his red face turning to white. Coming forward, he began a confused excuse for being at home at that hour of the day, saying there was so much to do when getting into a fresh place ; and that he had not been well for two days, had "had a sickness upon him." The Squire, never hard with the men, told him he was welcome to be there, and began talking about the garden.

"It is as rich a bit of land, Hill, as any in the parish, and you may turn it to good account if you are industrious. Does your wife intend to keep chickens?"

"Well, sir, I suppose she will. The town-bred women don't understand far about 'em, though. It may be a'most as much loss as profit."

"Nonsense," said the Squire, in his quick way. "Loss! when you have every convenience about you! This used to be the fowl-house in Hopton's time," he added, rapping the side of the shed with his stick. "Why! you've been putting a padlock on it, Hill!"

For the door was fastened with a padlock ; a new one, to judge by its brightness. Hill made no comment. He had taken up the rake again and was raking vigorously at the dead leaves. I wondered what he was shaking for.

"Have you got any treasures here, that you should lock it up?"

"Only the watering can, sir, and a few o' my garden tools," answered Hill. "There's a heap of loose characters about, and nothing's safe from 'em."

Putting his back against the shed, the Squire suddenly called on Hill to face him, and entered on the business he had come upon. "Where was David Garth? Did he, Hill, know anything about him?"

Hill had looked pale before; I said so; but that was nothing to the frightful whiteness that took him now. Ears, lips, neck; all turned the hue of the dead. The rake shook in his grasp; his teeth chattered.

"Come, Hill," said the Squire; "I see you have got something to say."

But Hill protested he had nothing to say: except that the boy's absence puzzled him. The Squire put some home questions, upon the points spoken of by Miss Timmens, showing Hill that we knew all. He then told him he might take his choice: to answer, or go before the magistrates.

Apparently Hill saw the futility of holding out longer. His very aspect would have convicted him, as the Squire said: if he had committed murder, he could not have looked more guilty. Glancing shudderingly around on all sides, as though the air had phantoms in it, he whispered his version of the morning's work.

It was true that he *had* gone to the house expecting to find David in it; and it was true that when he entered he found him flown. Not wishing alarm to get to the boy's mother, he told Jim Batley that David had gone by early train to Worcester: he told the mother so. As to the boots, Hill declared they were his own, not David's; and that Jim's eyes must have been deceived in the size. And he vowed and declared he knew no more than this, or where David could have got to.

"What do you think you deserve for locking the child in the house by himself?" asked the Squire, sternly.

"Everything that'll come upon me through it," readily acknowledged Hill. "I could cut my hands off now for having done it; but I never thought he'd be really frightened. It's just as if his ghost had been haunting me ever since; I see him a-following of me everywhere."

"His ghost!" exclaimed the Squire. "Do you suppose he's dead?"

"I don't know," said the man, passing his shaking hand across his damp forehead. "I wish to heaven I had let him go off to his grandmother's that same blessed night!"

"Then you wish me to understand, Hill, that you absolutely know nothing of where the boy may be?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"Don't you think it might have been as well if you had told the truth from the first?" asked the Squire, rather sarcastically.

"Well, sir, one's mind gets confused at times, and I thought of his

mother. I couldn't be off seeing that if anything had happened, it lay on my shoulders for having left him alone, in there."

Whether the Squire believed Hill could tell more, I don't know. I did. As we went on to the school-house, he kept silent. Miss Timmens was frightfully disappointed at the result, and said Hill was a shifty scoundrel.

"I cannot tell what to think," the Squire remarked to her. "His manner is the strangest I ever saw; it is just as though he had something on his conscience. He said the boy's ghost seemed to haunt him. Did you notice that, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir. A queer idea."

"He—he—never could have found David dead in the morning?" cried Miss Timmens, in a low tone, turning, herself, a little pale. "Dead of fright?"

"That could not be," said the Squire. "You forget that David had made his escape before midnight, and was at his mother's, calling to her."

"True, true," assented Miss Timmens. "Any way, I am certain Hill is somehow or other deceiving us, and he is a born villain for it."

But Hill, deceiving us though he had been, could not hold out. In going back, we saw him leaning over the palings waiting for us. But that the man is living yet, I should have said he was going to die there and then, for he looked exactly like it.

It seemed that just after we quitted him, a policeman had made his appearance. Not as a policeman, but as a friend; for he and Hill were cronies. He told Hill confidentially that there was "going to be a row over that there lost boy; that folks were saying that he might have been murdered; that unless Hill could tell something satisfactory about him, he and others might be in custody before the day was over." Whether Hill found himself brought to a point from which there was neither advance nor retreat, or that he saw inevitably the concealment could no longer be maintained, or that he was stricken to despair, and helpless, I don't know. There he stood, with his head over the palings, saying he would tell all.

It was a sad tale to listen to. Miss Timmens's last supposition was right—Hill upon going up to release David Garth, had found him dead. And, so far as the man's experience of death went, he must have been dead for six or seven hours.

"I'd like you to come and see him, sir."

Gingerly stepped the Squire in Hill's wake across the garden to the shed. Unlocking the door, Hill stepped back for us to enter. On a mattress on the ground was David, laid straight in his every-day clothes, and covered with a blanket, his pretty hair, which his mother had loved so, smoothed carefully. Hill,—rough, burly, cross-grained Hill,—burst into tears and sobbed like a child.

"I'd give my life to undo it, and bring him to again, Squire; I'd give my life twice over, Master Johnny; but I declare before Heaven, I never thought to harm the boy. When I see him the next morning, lying dead, I'd not have minded if the Lord had struck me dead too. I've been a'most mad ever since."

"Johnny," said the Squire, in a low tone, "go you to South Crabb, and bring over Mr. Cole. Don't talk of this."

The surgeon was at home, and came back with me. I did not quite understand why the Squire sent for him, seeing he could do no good.

And the boots were David's, after all; the only things he had taken off. Hill had brought him to this shed the next night; with some vague idea of burying him in the ground under the leaves. "But I couldn't do it," he avowed amid his sobs, "I couldn't do it."

There was an examination: Cole and another making it; and they gave evidence at the inquest. One of them (it was Cole) thought the boy must have died from fright, the other from cold; and a nice muff this last must have been!

"I did not from the first like that midnight call, or the apparently causeless terror the poor mother woke up in," said Mrs. Todhetley, to me. "The child's spirit must have cried to her in his death-agony. I have known a case like this before."

"But——"

"Hold your tongue, Johnny. You have not lived long enough to get experience of these things."

And I held it.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



THE FIRST CHRISTMAS ROSE.

IT was long, long ago, when the earth was still very young, and all nature at its brightest and best. Winter had set in early. Already at the end of the month we call September, all the trees were decked in the red and yellow hues of decay; by October they were leafless, and ere November had well set in, all vegetation had provided against the biting cold and the rough wind of winter.

Vigorously he was coursing over the earth, as though it were a mansion he had to cleanse and purify. With remorseless fury he swept hill and dale, plain and field; searching hidden corners, ruffling smooth sheets of water, chasing diseases from out the habitations where heat and neglect had engendered them. In his heedless course over the face of nature, he inflicted many an injury also, breaking the tender twigs from sturdy trees, snapping young saplings, leaving many a scene of devastation behind him.

He heeded this not; he had a mission to fulfil, and accomplished it should be at all risks, notwithstanding all obstacles. He cannot be tender as well as efficient; that icy blast that comes wafted straight from the eternal polar cold. His nature is hard, stern, relentless, unforgiving, like unto the region whence he springs.

The earth shook and shivered under the scrutinizing blast, and it felt very sad; for it was leafless and barren. As though to comfort it, soft flakes of snow began to fall from out of the leaden clouds that overhung the sky; at first gently, then more and more heavily, until at last the ground was covered by a soft mantle of purest white, cold without, to all semblance, but warm beneath, shielding earth's crust and the tender plants within its bosom from the bitter season. It powdered the leafless trees with its dazzling hoar, making them look like frosted silver.

Still the cold went on increasing and increasing, till it decked the lakes and rills with a covering of massive ice, and froze the nightly dew into diamonds.

It was now the middle of December, and the North Wind, seeing he had fulfilled his mission, departed home, no tender objects being left uncovered by the merciful snow, whereon he might break his fury. He was followed by his brother the East Wind, no gentle successor. But he swept the sky free from clouds, and bade the blue heavens and the sunshine reappear; and if his breath was no softer than his predecessor's, yet the whole creation bore a brighter aspect under his reign. The icy envelope of the trees shimmered like crystal in the bright frosty air; the

snowy covering of the ground dazzled by its whiteness. Each day the sun poured down its golden flood of light from out a cloudless firmament, making the world look cheery in its frosty winter garb.

The day before Christmas, the sun's rays shone down with yet greater splendour and intensity. Some of the summer's departed heat seemed revived in its beams, and as it flooded the earth with its peerless light, it melted a little of the snowy cloak, and above all it bent its energy upon a spot that had in summer been one of its favourite nooks (it was a pretty dell, where the spring blossoms peeped the earliest, and the autumn flowers lingered longest), the frost vanished, and the cold bare earth met the sun's light. The ray lingered on, kissing its favourite, in tender mourning and comfort for its wintry desolation. Its grateful warmth penetrated the frozen surface; deeper and deeper yet sank the kiss of the fiery orb. It roused the earth from its dreary winter sleep. Half awakened, yet still benumbed from the long spell of cold, it felt the delicious heat and softness steal into its heart once more, setting it a-dreaming. It fancied that Spring, its beloved Spring, was at hand, with light, warmth, sunshine, sweet flowers, and balmy air. Thus it continued dreaming long after the warmth had passed from the nook to visit other places.

Christmas morning, when at the appointed time the sun came again, the dark bare ground that had uncovered yesterday showed signs of awakening; and when he had once more kissed it with his rays; when he had once more bent the whole force of his bright eye upon the spot; the earth, yet dreaming of the things to be, broke its hard wintry crust, and in answer to this breath of the future, bloomed forth a pure white blossom.

There it stood alone, amid the cold and desolation, sole memento of the flowers that had been, the blossoms yet to come. Men when they saw it named it a Christmas Rose.

And ever since that day, in grateful memory of the sun's kind kiss, of its blessed forewarning of Spring, whenever a sunny Christmas Day dawns upon earth, it puts forth these snowy buds, an earnest of the future, a final greeting from the profusion of the past to the dying and to the coming year.

HELEN ZIMMERN.



JOSEPH GOLDING'S LAST CHRISTMAS.

IT was very strange, thought old Joseph Golding, that he couldn't be master of his own mind. He had lived a great many years, and neither remorse nor memory had ever been in the habit of disturbing him; but now it seemed to him as if the very foundations of his life were breaking up. He was well through with his day's work—he had dined comfortably—he sat in an easy chair in a luxurious drawing-room, whose crimson hangings shut out the still cold of the December afternoon—he had nothing to do but enjoy himself. Mr. Golding liked to enjoy himself at this season as much as others did, for it was Christmas Eve. What though he was in the habit of spending it solitarily?—he liked solitude. Perhaps because nothing more lively came in his way, and he was too shy and proud to look out for it.

For many a year on Christmas Eve he had sat balancing in his mind the great accounts presented in his ledgers, the accumulating coffers at his banker's, the strokes of business he would make in future. Not so now. The year was drawing to a close: some intruding voice kept whispering that in like manner so was his career. He could not put it from him, try as he would. The voice reminded him of a coming time when his life's work would be all done—even as his day's work was all done now—when he would be ready to sit down in the evening and look over the balance-sheet of his deeds, good and evil. Curiously the old days came trooping in slow procession before him. And he had been able to forget them for so very long!

His dead wife. He had not loved her much when she was with him, but how vivid was his memory of her now! He could see her moving round the house, noiseless as a shadow, never intruding on him after he had once or twice repulsed her gruffly, but going on her own meek, still ways, with her face growing whiter every day. He began to understand, as he looked back, why her strength had failed; and she had been ready, when her baby came, to float out on the tide and let it drift her into God's haven. She had had enough to eat and to drink, but he saw now that he had left her heart to starve. Heaven! what a hard man he had been! He seemed to see her white, still face, as he looked at it the last time before they screwed down the coffin lid, with the dumb reproach frozen on it; the eyes that would never plead vainly any more, closed for ever.

He recalled how passionately the three-days-old baby had cried in another room just at that moment, moving all the people gathered together for the funeral with a thrill of pity for the poor little motherless

morsel. She *was* a passionate, wilful baby, all through her babyhood ; he remembered that. She wanted—missed without knowing what the lack was—the love and sustenance which her mother would have given her, and protested against fate with all the might of her infant lungs. But as soon as she grew old enough to understand how useless it was, *she* had grown quiet, too ; just like her mother. He recalled her, all through her girlhood, a shy, still girl, always obedient and submissive, but never drawing very near him. Why ? Because he would have repulsed her as he repulsed her mother. He could see it now. It was very strange these facts should come back to him to-day, and their naked truth with them. He had been a cold, hard, ungenial man, without sympathy for any one human being ; absorbed utterly in the pursuit of money-making. And so the child, Amy, had grown up in shadow without him.

But suddenly, when she was eighteen, the old, passionate spirit that had made her cry so when a baby must have awakened again, he thought ; for she fell in love then, and wished to marry. To marry in defiance of his wishes. He remembered her standing proudly before him after one of their quarrels, where he had been harsh and bitter, and abusive of the man she wanted to call husband. She had borne in silence reproach of herself ; but not of him who had become to her as her best existence. Her words came back to the old man now.

"Father, do you know anything against Harry Church ?"

"Yes," he had answered, wrathfully ; "I know that he is as poor as Job was when he sat among the ashes. He cannot keep a wife as a daughter of mine must be kept."

"Anything else, father ?" looking him steadily in the eye.

"No, that's enough," he had thundered. "I'll tell you, besides, that if you marry him you must lie in the bed you will make. My doors will never open to you again, never."

He met with a will as strong as his own, that time. She *did* marry him, and went away with him from her father's house. Mr. Golding had known the day the wedding was to take place, and disdained to stop it. He washed his hands of Harry Church, and of Amy, his wife. She wrote home afterwards over and over again, but Mr. Golding sent all the letters back unopened. Subsequent to that, they disappeared from the town ; and he had never heard what became of them. It was at least ten years ago now.

It seemed very strange that these things should have come back to night to haunt him—and with a wild remorse, a pitiyng regret. He had done nothing to recall them. Could it be his sense of failing health that brought them?—if so, what sort of anguish might he not look for as he drew nearer and nearer to the ending ? He began to wish that he knew what had been in those rejected letters—whether Amy had been suffering for anything that money could supply. The next thought that struck him was, why he had opposed the marriage so viru-

lently. It is true Harry Church had been but a clerk in his own employ; but he was a well-educated gentleman, and would rise with time. Faithful, intelligent, persevering, respected—but poor. In that last word lay the head and front of Harry Church's offending. He, Joseph Golding, was rich then: he was far richer now; but, he could not help asking it, what special good were his riches bringing him? He was an old man, the span of life running quickly on, and he was all alone. Who would take his gold then? He could not carry it along with him. All in a moment—he saw it clearly—the dreadful truth stood naked and bare: his life and its object had been mistaken ones.

"All alone! all alone!" he kept saying to himself, in a sort of vague self-pity. "I've toiled and worked for nought!"

But during this time, even now, as he sat there, a message of love was on its way to him. Perhaps Heaven had but been preparing his heart to receive it!

He heard a ring at the door-bell. Heard it without paying attention to it. Rings were nothing to him; people did not come on business to his residence, and of visitors he expected none. Down went his head lower and lower with its weight of thought.

Meanwhile two people were admitted into the hall below: a man and a little girl. The man had the appearance of a staid, respectable servant. He took off the child's warm cloak and hood, and she stood revealed: a dainty, delicate creature of some eight years old; her golden curls drooping softly round her face, with its large blue eyes and its cherry lips. The admitting maid, not knowing what to make of this, called Mr. Golding's housekeeper, old Mrs. Osgood. The latter went into a tremor as she came forward and looked at the face.

"It's Miss Amy's child!" she exclaimed to the man, nervously. "I couldn't mistake the likeness."

"Miss Amy's that was," he answered. "Mrs. Harry Church she has been this many a year."

"I know. It is as much as my place is worth to admit any child of her's here."

"You are Mrs. Osgood," exclaimed the little girl. "Mamma said I should be sure to see you."

"Hear the blessed lamb! And so she remembers me."

"She talks of you often: she says you were always kind to her: nobody but you loved her."

"Well, I *did* love her. The old house has never been the same since she went out of it. What's your name, my pretty one?"

"Amy."

"Amy!" repeated the housekeeper, lifting her hands, as if there were some wonder in it.

"And mamma said you would let me go up alone to grandpapa."

"And so you *shall*," decided Mrs. Osgood, after a minute's hesi-

tation. "I won't stand in the way of it, let master be as angry with me as he will. He is up in the drawing room, all by himself."

The man sat down to wait. And the child went up alone.

Opening the door, she went softly in, not speaking: perhaps the stern-looking old man, sitting there with bent head, awed her to silence. Joseph Golding, waking up from his deep reverie, saw a letter held out to him. He took it mechanically, supposing its messenger, hidden behind his large chair, was one of his waiting-maids. With a singular quickening of pulse, he recognized his daughter's writing.

She had waited all these silent years, she told him, because she was determined never to write to him again until they were rich enough for him to know that she did not write from any need of his help. They had passed these ten years in the West, and Heaven had prospered them. Her husband was a rich man now, and she wanted from her father only his love—wanted only, that death should not come between them, and either of them go to her mother's side without having been reconciled to the other.

"How did this come here?—who brought it?" demanded Mr. Golding, in his usual imperious manner.

"I did, grandpapa."

He sprang up at the soft timid voice, as if some fright took him, and stared at the lovely vision, standing there like a spirit on his hearth-stone, with her white face and her gleaming golden hair. Was it real? Where was he? Who could this child be? But, as he looked, the likeness flashed upon him—and he grew hungry to clasp her to him. It was the little Amy of the old days grown into beauty—for Amy had never been so wondrously fair as this.

"Come here, my child; don't be afraid. Tell me what your name is."

"Amy, grandpapa."

Another Amy! Grandpapa! He felt the sobs rising up in his heart with a great flood of emotion; but he choked them back.

"What have they told you about me?" he rejoined, after a long pause. "Have they bid you hate me?"

"They always told me that you were far away toward where the sun rose; and if I were good they would bring me to see you some day. Every night I say in my prayers, 'God bless papa and mamma, and God bless grandpapa.'"

"Why *didn't* they bring you? What made them let you come alone?"

"Mamma sent me with John to give you the letter," was the simple answer. "The carriage is at the gate, waiting for me."

"Who is John?"

"Papa's servant."

"And—where are they staying?"

"At the hotel. We only got here this morning."

Mrs. Osgood, hovering in the hall, looked on in wonder. Her mas-

ter was coming down stairs, calling for his hat and coat, and leading the child. He got into the carriage with her and it drove away. Mr. Golding was wondering vaguely whether it were real.

They arrived at last, and the child led him in, opening a door at the end of a long corridor. She spoke cheerfully.

"Mamma, here's grandpapa. He said he would come back with me."

Mr. Golding's head went off in a swim. Advancing weakness tells upon people in such moments as these. He sat down; and there were Amy's arms—his own Amy's—about his neck. Which of the two sobbed the most, could not be told. Why had he never known what he lost through all those vanished years?

"Father, are we reconciled at last?"

"I don't know, my daughter; until you tell me whether you forgive me."

"There should be no talk about forgiveness," she said. "You went according to your own opinion of what was right. And perhaps I was to blame, too. Father, it is enough that God has brought us together again in peace. I thought that no one could resist my little Amy, least of all, her grandpapa."

He looked up. The child stood by, silently; the firelight glittering on her golden hair, her face shining strangely sweet. He put out his arms and drew her into them, close—where no child, not even his own, had ever nestled before. Oh how much he had missed in life!—he knew it now. He felt her clinging hold round his neck—her kisses dropped upon his face like the pitying dew from heaven; and he—was it himself, or another soul in his place?

"Father, see."

Amy's voice had a full, cheerful ring in it. Her married life had been happy. Mr. Golding turned at the call.

"Here are Harry and the boys waiting to speak to you," she said in a less assured tone.

He shook his son-in-law's hand heartily. Old feuds, old things, were over now, and all was become new. In his heart, until that trouble came, he had always liked Harry Church. Then he looked at the two boys, brave, merry little fellows, of whom he might be proud.

Explanations ensued. Fortune had favoured Mr. Church; they had come back for good, and were already looking out for a house.

"No house but mine," interrupted Joseph Golding. "It will want a tenant when I am gone. You must come home to-morrow."

"To-morrow will be Christmas day," said his daughter, half-doubtingly.

"All the better. If Christmas was never kept in my house, it shall be now. I shall not live to see another, Amy."

She looked up at the changed, thin face, and could not contradict him. Some one, going out to the West Indies, had told them how

Joseph Golding was breaking: the news had caused them to hurry home prematurely. Amy said to her husband that if her father died, unreconciled to her, she should be full of remorse for ever.

"You will come home to-morrow, all of you," repeated Mr. Golding. "And mind, Amy, you do not go away again."

"But—if the children should be too much for you, father!"

"When they are, I'll tell you," he said, with a touch of the former gruffness. "The old house is large enough."

He went out; and found his way to the shops—open to the last on Christmas Eve in the old town—looking for Christmas gifts. New work for him!—but he entered into it earnestly. Perambulating the streets like a bewildered Santa Claus he went home laden with books, and toys, and jewels, and bon-bons. Mrs. Osgood lifted her hands, and thought the end of the world must be coming.

"Help me to put these things away, Osgood. Don't stare as if you were moonstruck. And, look here—there'll be company to dinner to-morrow. Mind you send in a good one."

"The best that ever was seen on a table, master—if it's for them I think it may be for."

"Well, it is. Miss Amy's coming home again."

"Heaven be praised, sir! The house has been but a dull one since she left it."

"They are all coming. And they will not go away again, Osgood. If you want more servants, you can get them."

"It's the best Christmas Box you could have given me, master."

And they came. Amy and Amy's husband and the pretty boys were there; and, best of all, the sweet little girl with the golden hair, sitting next to grandpapa. It was too happy a party for loud mirth. And among them Joseph Golding saw, or fancied he saw, *another* face, over which, almost thirty years ago, he had watched the grave-sod piled—a face sad and wistful no longer, but bright with a strange glory. Close over beyond him she seemed to stand; and he heard, or fancied that he heard, a whisper from her parted lips, though it might have come only from his own heart,

"Peace on earth and goodwill toward men."

SOMETHING ABOUT DIAMONDS.

NUMEROUS are the definitions that have been attempted of "Beauty"; it has been asserted to consist of harmony, proportion, fitness, utility, or each or all of these combined; but however philosophers differ as to its essentials, it has one undeniable element, and that is Light.

Who has not lingered to gaze on the silver radiance of the moon and the splendour of stars? Who has not been startled by the transmutation of a common-place scene to a vision of glory by a sudden gleam of sunshine? Who has not watched with delight the iridescent sparkle of water as it flashes from cascade or fountain in the sun's rays? Those who have not felt the beauty of these things, can have no true appreciation of the diamond, for the diamond may be described as crystallized light. Something of its essence exists in the commonest substances for men's daily use; in the grain he eats, in the fuel he burns. Wonderful alchemy of nature, that, extracting all extraneous matter from carbon, solidifies it into a precious gem!

The ancients had little or no knowledge of the beauty of the diamond; they were aware of many of its properties, hence the name of Adamantos, the indomitable; but as the art of cutting this hardest of all substances was not discovered till comparatively modern times, the Greeks and Romans used it but little for ornamental purposes, preferring the ruby, emerald, sapphire, and other coloured stones.

The first mention of the diamond takes us back to the legendary period; it was one of the dragon-stones, said to be produced in the head of that creature: in order to gain possession of the gem, it was necessary to cut off the dragon's head while alive; otherwise, owing to "the spite of the beast," when finding itself dying, the stone did not properly form. Sotacus relates the manner of capturing the dragon by strewing narcotics in its way. Philostratus gives us a still fuller account of the method of securing the dragon-stones: "The Indians having woven letters of gold in a scarlet robe, spread it out before the den, but first of all magically infuse a soporific power into these letters, whereby the dragon hath his eyes overcome, losing all power to turn them away. They also sing over him many spells of their mystic art whereby he is drawn forth, and putting his neck outside of his den, falls asleep upon the letters. Then the Indians, assailing him as he lies, cut off his head with their axes, and make prize of the gems within it; for in the heads of these mountain dragons are secreted gems bright-coloured to the eye, and reflecting all kinds of hues, of virtue,

moreover, indescribable." From this, one would be led to suppose that the art of cutting the diamond had even then been practised in India; but Sotacus, on the contrary, speaks of this stone as admitting of no polishing or engraving.

The diamond was the sixth stone in the breast-plate of judgment worn by the High-Priest of the Jews; the Hebrew term is "jahalon," said to be derived from the verb "halam, to strike," on account of its hardness.

Pliny speaks of the adimas or diamond as the most valuable, not only amongst precious stones, but amongst human possessions: The particles, he goes on to say, are held in great request by engravers, who enclose them in iron, and are enabled thereby, with the greatest facility, to cut the very hardest substances known.

From the earliest times up to the beginning of the eighteenth century, India was supposed to be the only diamond-producing country. The first brought to Europe were from the kingdoms of Visapoor and Golconda. They were found at the base of the Neela Mulla mountains, in the neighbourhood of the Krischna and Pomar rivers—a district so sterile that previously to the discovery of the treasures contained in its soil, it was little better than a desert. During the rainy season the floods descend in torrents from the mountains, and after their subsidence numbers of diamonds are found in the ferruginous sands washed down from the rocks.

The diamonds thus found were conveyed to the city of Golconda, where they were disposed of either to native princes or foreign merchants. The qualities of the diamonds were distinguished by the names of the Hindoo castes; the best and largest were called Brahma, the second Krischna, the third Bysch, and the fourth Sudra. The use of these gems was formerly a regal privilege of the Rajahs and Sultans; but as successive dynasties were overthrown, diamonds ceased to be the exclusive property of royalty.

The tradition of a valley of diamonds, similar to that described in the story of "Sindbad the Sailor," is of great antiquity. The celebrated Venetian traveller of the thirteenth century, Marco Polo, thus relates what he heard on the subject: "In the summer, when the heat is excessive and there is no rain, they—the Indians—ascend the mountains with great fatigue, as well as with considerable danger, from the number of snakes with which they are infested. Near the summit it is said there are deep valleys, full of caverns and surrounded by precipices, amongst which the diamonds are found: and here many eagles and white storks, attracted by the snakes on which they feed, are accustomed to make their nests. The persons who are in quest of the diamonds take their stand near the mouths of the caverns, and from thence cast down several pieces of flesh, which the eagles and storks pursue into the valleys, and carry off with them to the tops of the rocks.

Thither the men immediately ascend, drive the birds away, and recovering the pieces of meat, frequently find diamonds sticking to them."

In the time of Tavernier, a French jeweller, who published his travels in the East in the 17th century, the mines of Golconda employed 60,000 persons, and in a still earlier age were so productive, that the Sultan Mahmoud, who died at the end of the 12th century, left more than four hundred pounds' weight of diamonds in his treasury.

The largest quantities of diamonds are now imported from the Brazils; they were found accidentally whilst searching for gold. So little did the gold-seekers suspect the nature of the little hard translucent pebbles occasionally picked up, that they either tossed them carelessly away, or used them as counters while playing cards. One Bernardo Fonsica Lobo, however, who had seen rough diamonds in India, formed a shrewd guess as to their value, and took several to Lisbon, where they were identified as real diamonds. From that time gold digging was abandoned to slaves, and all the population united in the search for the precious gems. These valuable productions of the Brazilian soil were at first found in immense quantities; in the first fifty years after the discovery, it is said that diamonds to the value of twelve millions sterling were exported.

The process of digging and washing is entirely carried on by negroes. Large diamonds are of course rarely found. If a slave discovers one of eighteen carats' weight, he immediately receives his freedom, with the privilege of working for himself thenceforward.

These precious stones are scattered about in such profusion, that whenever a fowl is killed, the crop is examined, and diamonds frequently found. A negro once was fortunate enough to find a diamond worth three hundred pounds sterling adhering to the root of a cabbage he had plucked up for his dinner. Fowls are well known to be addicted to picking up any shining substance instead of gravel. The only diamond ever found in Europe was discovered a few years ago in Wicklow, and was supposed to have been conveyed thither by some bird of passage. In Gibraltar, the migratory pigeons caught at certain seasons have frequently particles of gold-dust about their feet, brought, no doubt, from the auriferous deposits in the hitherto unexplored regions of Africa.

The diamond supply from the Brazils is now falling off, but it appears that we are on the discovery of new fields that may probably prove as productive as the districts of Golconda and Cerro do Frio. Late news from Ballarat give notices of fresh discoveries. A Diamond Mine Company has been established at Melbourne, the object of which is to work a field on the Cudgegong river, in New South Wales, where not only diamonds, but numbers of other precious stones have been found. Most of the diamonds hitherto picked up have been brought to Melbourne: the

value of one of these stones is estimated at four hundred pounds sterling. Diamonds have also been lately discovered at the Cape of Good Hope. When we consider the wide districts of Australia and Africa now open to exploration, it is impossible to set a limit to the riches that may be revealed. As objects of beauty, the preciousness of diamonds must always remain the same; but it is just possible that great discoveries may so far reduce their marketable value, as to render the possession of a *parure* of diamonds no longer a mark of distinguished rank or wealth. As jewels are not subject to wear and tear, every stone found is one added to the world's store; those worn by the Roman Empresses are no doubt still in existence; and in purchasing a jewelled ring, we may possibly acquire possession of a gem that once sparkled on the finger of a Julia or Faustina.

Though the pure white diamond, colourless and pellucid as water, is the most esteemed, these stones are found of various hues; yellow, blue, pink, green, and even black. One of the most perfect specimens of the coloured diamond is that belonging to Mr. Hope, which unites the lovely hue of the sapphire with the brilliancy of the more precious gem. The insignia of the St. Esprit, formerly worn by the kings of France, consists of a dove formed of a single sapphire, mounted on a ground of white brilliants, and surrounded by blue diamonds of a colour almost as intense as the sapphire. The button of the king of Saxony's hat of state is composed of a splendid green diamond of great value.

The diamond possesses a remarkably high refractive power: it is to this power of separating the rays of light into their elementary colours that its great brilliancy is owing. Though it is found in numerous forms, they are all derived from the regular octahedron. The facets of the crystal are often curved, however, thus giving the stone a spherical appearance. The structure is lamellar, and the diamond may be readily cleaved parallel to the plane of the octahedron.

Boetius de Boot, in 1609, was the first to suggest its inflammability; the same surmise was made by the great Newton; but the first record of experimental proof was from the Academy of Florence, in 1694, under Duke Cosmo the Third, when a diamond was subjected to a powerful burning-lens. It first split, then emitted sparks, and finally disappeared. M. Guyon de Morveau, in 1785, exposed a diamond enclosed in a cavity in a piece of iron to intense heat. When the cavity was opened, the diamond had entirely vanished, but the iron around was converted into steel, thus proving the gem to consist of pure carbon.

It has been found possible to manufacture diamonds by the crystallization of carbon, but hitherto of a size so infinitesimally minute as to be of no value except in a scientific point of view. Brilliant points may occasionally be observed in coke that has been exposed to furnace

heat; these are diamond particles, and are capable of cutting glass. Thus in the marvellous laboratory of nature, the commonest and poorest matter becomes converted into the most precious gem.

The diamond frequently becomes phosphorescent on exposure to the sun's rays. The Honourable Robert Boyle, writing in 1672, says, "I have had in my keeping a diamond which, by water made a little more than lukewarm, I could bring to shine in the dark." It is no doubt this phosphorescent quality that gave rise to the legendary power of diamonds and carbuncles to emit light; a belief we find very ancient. In the Talmud it is said that Noah had no other light in the ark than that furnished by precious stones. The Vedas of the Brahmins also speak of a place lighted by rubies and diamonds which emit light like that of the planets.

The rough diamond is little more attractive than the common pebble; its brilliancy being concealed under a hard crust, that can only be removed by diamond powder. Though the art of cutting this gem has only been brought to perfection during the last few centuries—those cut and polished at Golconda being of clumsy workmanship—the stone was formerly valued for other, and for the most part fabulous, qualities. If the Eastern monarchs wore diamonds about their persons, it was principally because they regarded them as talismans, as having magical properties; and the same belief was shared by all nations. Serapius ascribes to this gem the power of keeping at a safe distance lemmings, incubes, and succubos; and of making men courageous and magnanimous. It was also thought to nullify the attractive power of the magnet. The Indians believe that diamond powder taken into the mouth causes the teeth to fall out; and that the stone acts as a preservative against lightning.

There is mention in history of a cloak of Charlemagne's, the clasp of which was formed by two diamonds; and in the inventory of the effects of the Duke of Anjou, in 1360 or 1368, a diamond cut into the form of a shield is amongst the list of valuables. It was not, however, until the time of a clever lapidary of the name of Hermon, in the beginning of the 15th century, that a glimpse was obtained of the real magnificence of the diamond as an article of ornament; but it was reserved for Louis Van Berghem, forty years later, to discover the method of cutting the diamond into regular facets, thus revealing the jewel in its full beauty. He established a guild of diamond-cutters in Bruges; but his pupils, driven from this place by the intolerance of the priests, afterwards settled in Antwerp and Amsterdam. The latter town still has the repute of possessing the first diamond-cutting factory in the world. It was here, in the establishment of M. Coster, that the Koh-i-noor was recut in 1852.

The operation may more properly be described as grinding than cutting. The stone is applied to the surface of a flat iron plate, covered

with oil and diamond-dust, and rotating with great velocity. The extreme nicety required in diamond-cutting may be imagined when it is remembered that multitudes of these gems are so small, that it takes one thousand to weigh a single carat.

The origin of the carat—four grains Troy weight—is from the Arabic word “Kuara,” the name of the seed of a pod-bearing plant. These seeds are uniformly of the same gravity, and were used for weighing against gold-dust. The weight was adopted in Hindostan, and thence all over the world.

The rage for the possession of these precious stones so much increased after the revelation of their extreme beauty by Van Berghem, that Paris alone, in the time of the Cardinal Mazarin—who was a great diamond fancier—supported seventy-five diamond-cutters. In England also were several renowned lapidaries, whose work was so perfect that even now the diamonds called “old English” are much prized. The art, however, in this country has declined.

In the Middle Ages extravagant use was made of diamonds as well as of other precious stones. The descriptions of some of the state-dresses worn in those days appear almost fabulous. Take the dress worn by Queen Mary on the occasion of her marriage with Philip the Second of Spain, for instance. It was made in the French style, we are told. The close gown or kirtle was of white satin, wrought with silver; the robe, richly brocaded on a gold ground, with a long train, was bordered with pearls and diamonds of a great size; the large rebras sleeves were turned up with clusters of gold set with pearls and diamonds. Her chaperon or coif was bordered with two rows of large diamonds, and on her breast was a diamond of inestimable value, presented to her by her bridegroom.

A robe was prepared for Marie de Medici for a christening ceremony, trimmed with 32,000 pearls and 3000 diamonds, and valued at 60,000 crowns; this magnificent robe had one defect, however—it was too heavy to be worn. Nor was this splendour confined to ladies' apparel. The Dukes of Burgundy and other wealthy noblemen not only appeared with garments sparkling with diamonds and other jewels, but had the housings and chanfrins of their horses set with gems. There is one thing to be said, however; diamonds were so much portable property, that could be secreted or removed at any moment. In times of revolution and political ferment, jewels have always risen in price. In Paris, during the great Revolution, diamonds doubled their value; and even now, in countries where the government is insecure, wealth is partly kept in the form of jewellery in case of emergency.

When the banking system was in its infancy, and letters of credit were unthought of, such means of conveying property were very convenient; as Marco Polo and his brothers found on returning to Venice after their twenty-four years' absence in the East. They had diffi-

culty in gaining admission to their family mansion—a handsome palace in the street of San Giovanni, Chrisostomo—having been reported dead. Shabby, threadbare, and travel-stained, they were not particularly reputable relations to acknowledge, and they did not find it altogether easy at first to prove their identity. Soon after their arrival they sent to invite all their relatives to a sumptuous banquet, when they appeared in three successive changes of raiment, each more splendid than the last. When the entertainment was over, Marco Polo rose from his seat, and going into an adjoining room, returned with the three patched and much-worn garments in which the brothers had appeared on their first return. With the assistance of a knife these dresses were ripped up, and to the astonishment and delight of the assembled guests, quantities of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and other gems were produced from the linings of the patches, and heaped on the banqueting-table. So great was the amount of wealth thus displayed, that the mansion of the brothers Polo received the name of “La Corte dei Millionari.” As may be supposed, no further opposition was made to their claims of relationship.

An engraver of the name of Giacomo di Tuzzo appears to have been the first who cut devices on the diamond. Several engraved diamonds are said to be extant; amongst the rest, an antique head, in the possession of the Duke of Bedford; but on account of the excessive hardness of this stone, such engravings are extremely rare, and it is even doubted whether those mentioned are not colourless sapphires.

There are only six great diamonds known in the world; that is, taking a hundred carats as the minimum. Each of these has its history. The largest is the one belonging to the Rajah of Mattam. The Dutch Governor of Batavia proposed to give £50,000 sterling, and two gun-boats, with stores and ammunition complete, for this wonderful jewel; but the offer was refused, on account of the Rajah's belief in the talismanic properties of this diamond, and consequent dependence of the fortune of his family on its possession.

The celebrated Koh-i-noor, or Mountain of Light, is well known. The Hindoos, with their usual exaggeration, trace it back to Kama, King of Anga, who reigned three thousand years ago, or even to the god Krischna. When Tavernier was in India, he saw it in the treasury of the Emperor Aurungzebe. In the beginning of the present century it was in the possession of the Khan of Cabul. Runjeet Singh having heard of this exquisite gem, determined to make it his own. To that end he invited the Khan to visit him at Lahore, and when his guest arrived, demanded the transfer of the diamond. The Khan had not been without his suspicions, however, and had provided himself with a crystal counterfeit; this, after much delay and pretended reluctance, he consented to part with. He was allowed to return home, and Runjeet Singh, delighted with his acquisition, sent for a jeweller in order to have the precious

diamond mounted. His exultation was soon changed to wrath, for the jeweller pronounced the supposed Koh-i-noor to be nothing but a piece of worthless crystal. The Khan of Cabul gained nothing by his deception in the long run. Runjeet Singh ordered his palace to be invested and ransacked, but no Koh-i-noor was found; at last a slave betrayed its hiding-place under a heap of ashes, and Runjeet Singh carried it off in triumph. When the Punjaub was conquered after the Sikh Mutiny, the Koh-i-noor fell into the hands of the English, and was presented to Queen Victoria in 1850.

The most romantic story is connected with the celebrated Sanci diamond. It formerly belonged to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, who wore it at the battle of Nancy, where he lost his life, in 1477. A Swiss soldier found the diamond on the field of battle, and sold it to a French gentleman of the name of Sanci, in whose family it was retained for nearly a hundred years. Henry III. of France, wishing to raise recruits amongst the Swiss, and finding his exchequer empty, borrowed the Sanci diamond, in order to pawn it. It was entrusted by M. Sanci to one of his servants; but neither servant nor diamond reached the place of destination. The king blamed M. Sanci for trusting the conveyance of so valuable a jewel to menial hands, but the latter had perfect confidence in the man's honesty, and his fears took another direction. He caused a search to be made, when it was discovered that the valet had been attacked and slain by robbers, and that the body was buried in a neighbouring forest. It would seem as if some promise had been made on the man's part, or it is difficult to imagine how such a proceeding could have occurred to his master. Be this as it may, M. Sanci had the body opened, and there the diamond was discovered, the man having swallowed it to save it from the brigands.

Diamonds are associated with many memorable events of history. It was to the diamond ring that the Emperor Charles V. gracefully lost to the Duchess D'Estampes, that he probably owed his liberty when passing through the dominions of his ancient enemy, Francis I. of France.

It was a diamond ring that was sent by Queen Elizabeth as a token of friendship to Mary Queen of Scots—a pledge that induced Queen Mary to entrust herself to English hands. This was one of those old-fashioned rings termed gimmel rings. It is described by the antiquary Aubrey as having consisted of separate joints, which, when united, formed the device of two right hands supporting a heart. The heart was composed of two diamonds, held together by a central spring, which, when opened, would allow either of the halves to be detached.

The story of the diamond necklace with which the fair fame of the unfortunate Marie Antoinette was involved—though there is now no doubt that the whole transaction was a swindle and a forgery—is familiar to all.

We have no occasion to go further back than our own era for one of

the most interesting diamond stories on record. It has always been the custom of the city of Paris to present the bride of the reigning sovereign with a gift on her wedding-day. When the Empress Eugenie was chosen to share the throne of Napoleon III., the city, represented by the Municipal Commission, voted the sum of 600,000 francs for the purchase of a diamond necklace. As soon as the vote was made known, the jewellers vied with each other in offering their choicest gems as contributions to this valuable gift. But two days after the vote, the fair young Empress caused her wish to be made known to the Commission, that the sum voted, instead of being expended in diamonds, should be employed in founding an educational institution for the poor girls of the Faubourg St. Antoine—an institution that will always be one of the brightest jewels in the Empress's crown.

A curious fact connected with diamonds is the intense love that has been lavished upon them, amounting to passion. It is related of a jeweller in Paris, that having had a diamond necklace stolen from him—a necklace he had spent much time in perfecting—he took the loss so much to heart, not for the money-value, but from love of the jewels, that he died raving mad some months after. There is a story also of several mysterious murders having been committed for the sake of robbery; these crimes were at length traced to a jeweller, who being unable to endure parting with the diamonds he had sold, had taken this method of repossessing himself of the gems.

It is a moot point how far it is allowable or desirable to sink wealth in the purchase of expensive jewellery; beautiful as it is, there may be other better ways in which we can make the riches that have been bestowed upon us available for the benefit of our fellow-creatures; this is not a question, however, that we are here called upon to decide. Admiring, as we must, the example of the Empress of the French, there is no occasion to condemn those who delight in precious gems—"these flowers of minerals," as Haiiy calls them. All the lovely productions of nature are good for man's use: and in the matter of personal adornment, as in other things, it must be remembered that it is not abstinence, but temperance, that is one of the virtues.



SHIRLEY MILL.

A Story.

IT looked a fair, peaceful picture in the glow of the setting sun. The mill was situated at the foot of a hill, which declined so gradually, that it ended in a broad, fertile valley; one of the most picturesque and most fertile valleys of the north. The romance and beauty of the spot was heightened by the stream running swiftly down in its course, and turning the huge wheel, by which was set in motion the machinery for grinding the corn, that day after day poured in upon the miller in ponderous white sacks. He had gained a reputation, this miller, for doing his work well and quickly; he also possessed an advantage over the few other mills in the county, inasmuch as that he was independent of the wind and its uncertainties.

Just now the sun was shining upon the stream, which seemed to flow down in a thread of mingled gold and silver; sparkling and glittering here and there, as though it had been struck into coin by some invisible mint belonging to the land of the fairies. The trees, scattered about, were waving and rustling in the soft evening breeze; those near the water seeming to whisper it a love-song, that would have soothed the most weary brain into a calm, delicious slumber. Even the mill itself, old and rickety though it was, added to the picturesque beauty of the scene. It resembled a particular note in a crude chord of harmony—something foreign to the rest, yet not out of place. It had stood there for years; generations; had owned many masters, and rung the changes of the good and the bad. Amongst which of the two classes its present possessor might be placed, the sequel of our story must show.

Fifty yards from the mill stood a small, well-built house, low and somewhat long; its trellis-casements heavy and sweet with trailing honey-suckle, that ran upwards and lost itself in the slanting roof. The sun, too, was glowing upon its windows, until the interior place seemed almost to be on fire. It was warm, early summer weather, and the heat had indeed been intense during the whole day.

As the sun gradually left the windows, the door of the cottage was opened, and a girl, who might have numbered some four-and-twenty years, stepped out into the porch. She was of middle height, and exquisitely formed; her face was of a rare oval; her dark, deep-blue eyes had fire imparted to them by the soft damask of her cheek. Somehow, in looking at her, the words "tender and true" instinctively rose up into the mind; yet the tenderness was not of that kind so often possessed

by a woman at the expense of strength of will. Her hair, of a bright golden colour, was wound round her head in a profusion of coils: at this moment, as she was raising her hand to shade her eyes, it suddenly became unloosened, and fell about her, below her waist, a glorious, golden veil. Though alone, the girl blushed vividly, and hastily gathered it up into its resting-place.

"I wonder where my father can be?" she said to herself. "He is generally ready for tea, and to-night he is keeping it waiting.

After some hesitation, she turned into the path that led to the mill. The strangest thing about this girl was her refinement. In walk, appearance, and speech she was perfectly refined; her clothes, simple and almost common, were worn with a grace that bespoke the innate gentlewoman. Alice Heath was indeed nothing less than this. She had not gone many steps when two men issued from the mill. She stopped suddenly; a flush of mortification rising to her face as she recognized the second figure. Then as quickly she turned back and re-entered the cottage.

She was almost immediately followed by the miller: a tall, fine man, with a face that would have been remarkably handsome, but for an expression that instinctively put you on your guard against him. His companion was younger, and very opposite. Short and somewhat clumsy in figure, his face, while possessing nothing bad about it, was far from attractive. Dark, almost to swarthinness, the black hair grew so low down upon the forehead that it gave him the appearance of a want of intellect. To the miller he possessed, however, an attraction which more than counterbalanced his physical defects: he was a well-to-do farmer, adding yearly to the not inconsiderable fortune inherited from his father. John Heath was a covetous man, and had saved a good deal. His ambition was to see his daughter married to James Cunningham. To the realization of this project there appeared to be but one obstacle, but that one was serious—Alice Heath would not have him. Cunningham did not, or would not see this, and continued his attentions. It seemed that his one virtue was perseverance. The miller saw it, however, and it angered him not a little. He took to treat his daughter harshly, seldom speaking except to find fault with her. "You are a fool," he would say on occasion; "James Cunningham is rich enough to make a lady of you. What with his wealth, and the money you will inherit from me, you might drive your coach and pair."

"Listen, father," said Alice, one day when he had made the above remark for the hundredth time: "You ask me, have asked me over and over again, to become James Cunningham's wife. *I never will.* I would sooner, far, far sooner die unmarried. Nay, if I had the option before me of that and death, I would choose to die!"

"A mad girl's freak," replied the miller, hotly, "and I will never give in to a girl's fancies. 'Tis two against one."

Since then everything had been uncomfortable at the mill. But just at this time an event occurred, which more than strengthened Alice's determination.

She had gone to spend a few days with an aunt, the widow of a lawyer, who had married a little above her station, and now lived a retired life in the nearest market-town, Drayton. Alice's visits to Mrs. Bax had been rare; but this present one was destined to colour her whole future life. On the very first evening she met there a young lawyer, who was endeavouring to struggle into practice. He could not but be struck with her remarkable beauty. Her whole manner was so refined and ladylike, her conversation so sensible, that he went away that night with a fresh chapter opened up in his life. Alice on her side thought she had never seen any one so attractive. And yet Edward Marchmont was not particularly handsome. A man of middle height, with a good, sensible face, and dark hair.

Alice's one week was prolonged into three, and then a peremptory summons from her father ordered her home again. But the mischief had been done. Mr. Marchmont's admiration for her and hers for him had grown into steady and fervent love. Before Alice left she had promised to become his wife. For the present the promise was to be kept secret; there was no other resource. She knew her father would never give his consent as long as James Cunningham stood in the way. Marchmont said he should occasionally visit the mill: perhaps in time he might find favour with the miller.

This state of things went on for about a year. Marchmont would come riding over, spend an evening with Heath and his daughter, and ride off again. It seemed that he had always some pretext for his visits in messages from Mrs. Bax. At length the miller began to fancy that these long rides were suspicious, and a doubt crossed him whether the young lawyer and Alice could be growing fond of each other. And this brings us down to the present time.

When Alice caught sight of her father and Cunningham, a shade of vexation passed over her face, and she quickly returned to the cottage. Mr. Heath, upon entering, looked round, and not seeing her, went upstairs to her room. There, sure enough, was Alice, seated near the window, looking sad and distressed, and—it must be confessed—just a little obstinate.

"Why are you not in your place?" he asked, sternly. "You saw me coming in from the mill."

"I know it," returned Alice. "It is because I saw you that I am not there, for I saw Mr. Cunningham also. Father," she continued, standing up before him, "you are killing me between you. Why does he persist in troubling me with his attentions?"

"I have told you, Alice, that not only does he wish it, but that I wish it," was the miller's dogged answer. "I have made up my mind

that you shall become the wife of James Cunningham, and so has he. Without much delay either, for he says he'll wait no longer. If you won't marry him there are hundreds who'd be glad to."

"Let them," said Alice, eagerly.

"Don't be so fast, girl. Ere many weeks have gone over our heads you'll be his wife."

"I will not," replied Alice, quietly. "A promise made by you, father, cannot be binding on me: he must know that for himself."

"It *shall* be binding," replied Heath, hotly. "I suppose you would not make quite so much difficulty if that milksop Marchmont were to ask for you. I will take care to stop *his* visits here for the future."

"It is too late."

"What do you mean?" cried the miller.

"I mean that I have, on my part, made a promise: a promise to become Mr. Marchmont's wife. And I will keep it—or never marry!"

"We will settle all this when we are alone," said Heath, quietly. "For the present, come and take your place at the tea-table."

She followed him downstairs in a few moments, and seated herself, bidding James Cunningham a distant good evening. Absent and uncomfortable during the meal, she listened dreamily to the conversation, without actually taking in the sense of what was said. Suddenly Alice flushed up to the roots of her hair: the sound of a horse's hoofs had become distinctly audible. She knew it was Mr. Marchmont.

Certainly the contrast between him and James Cunningham could not very well be more marked, as he entered. He was warm with riding; his usually pale face was flushed, adding light and lustre to his beautiful eyes: and as Mr. Heath looked at him, he could not but admit, with inward anger, that they would probably have a hard fight for victory.

"Good evening, Mr. Marchmont," he said, as distantly as he well could. "To what circumstance are we indebted for this visit?"

Ere this time the lawyer had begun to pay them visits without any other plea than his own inclination. It happened that Mrs. Bax had beckoned to him from her window this evening, and charged him with a commission.

"I have brought over a message from Mrs. Bax, for you and Alice," he replied. "Yours, Mr. Heath concerns business, and can wait. The one to Alice concerns herself. Mrs. Bax has not felt strong lately, and wishes Alice to go over and spend a week with her."

For a moment Alice's heart beat high with expectation; but her father's next words put an end to it.

"Alice can't go," he returned, decisively. "It will be a very long while before she again gets my consent to go off to that vanity-fair of a town. As for Mrs. Bax, I know what *her* ailments are: all imaginary. If she really wants Alice's society, tell her to come here."

"You know that my aunt never leaves home," interposed Alice. "I could easily go to her for a short time."

"Perhaps so," curtly replied Heath. "But I don't intend to give the question a trial, for more reasons than one. You may tell my sister, Mr. Marchmont, that my house is open to her if she chooses to come to it: but that, go to her Alice does not. She will shortly be better occupied," he added, with a meaning glance at Cunningham. "It will not be very long before she leaves my roof for good: but for a very different abode to that of a foolish, lackadaisical old woman."

With a look half anger, half despair, first at her father, then at Cunningham, Alice hastily rose from the table and left the room.

"You will wonder what I have referred to," continued Heath to Marchmont, with singular ill-taste and judgment. "It is just this. My daughter has promised to become the wife of Mr. James Cunningham, and that shortly. She has no time for visiting now."

It was with difficulty that Heath concluded the sentence. Marchmont had sprung up, and seemed at every word about to interrupt him.

"It is a lie!" was his first utterance: words not very well calculated to prove oil for troubled waters. "I do not, will not believe it, unless Alice herself acknowledges it. Even then I shall say that she has been forced into a seeming compliance. But it shall never be."

"You will have the goodness to recall that word," said Heath, his ace white with passion. "No man ever yet called me a liar, and no man shall do it with impunity. What right have you, sir, to come here with your soft face and subtle manners, to disturb the peace of a household?"

"The right of an honest man," returned Marchmont. "The knowledge that I am welcome, and more than welcome, to at least one member of this household. I come here with good intentions, Mr. Heath. Until now you have never questioned my right."

"Because I did not know what I know now," replied Heath, raising his voice. "But from this day I forbid you the house: you will again enter it at your peril. Whatever your wishes may have been, dismiss them from your mind as if they had never existed."

"That remains to be proved," returned Marchmont. "Mr. Cunningham, I appeal to you. Has Alice Heath promised to be your wife?"

"If you won't believe Mr. Heath's word, neither would you take mine, I suppose," answered Cunningham, after a moment's pause: for he did not like to tell a deliberate untruth. "I hope in the next few weeks to give you a better proof than that of mere words."

"You are equivocating," returned Marchmont. "This is merely playing with me. I do not believe a syllable of what you have stated. And for good reason. Let me tell you, that whether Alice has promised to be your wife or not, she has promised to be *mine*: and unless she herself wishes it, I will never release her from that promise."

"Marchmont," cried Heath, "never, with my consent, shall you have her. No pettifogging lawyer shall wed my daughter, but an honest, straightforward man—and a farmer. Alice marries James Cunningham—or she marries no one."

"Surely," returned Marchmont, in desperation, "you'd not force her into a marriage that would make her miserable for life? Mr. Cunningham, you cannot be unmanly enough to take her against her will?"

"Against her will," said Cunningham; "not it. As to her making a promise to two, that's nothing for girls to do. They've got all sorts of innocent follies about them."

And for answer Marchmont gave him only a look of scorn.

The conversation was continued for some time, and then Marchmont quitted the house to look after his horse.

"I hope you understand, Mr. Marchmont, that after to-night your visits here must cease altogether," said Heath, looking daggers at the intruder when he re-entered. "I'll not put up with any more of this nonsense. Remember, if you please, my message to my sister."

"And on your side, sir," returned Marchmont, "be so kind as to understand that I hold Alice to her promise. It was made sacredly, and I prize it too dearly to see it lightly broken. Whilst I live I will not give her up."

"It seems that I am to be a nonentity in this matter," put in Cunningham, turning angrily on the lawyer. "But I've just got this to say: I will not give up Miss Heath for the best man living. She has been promised to me, and I mean to have her. Had you come forward at first to Mr. Heath, in an open, honourable way, as I did, she might have decided off-hand between the two, and all this bother would have been avoided."

"There's no particular cause to part in anger," said the miller, pouring out some ale that had just been brought in. "Good health to you both."

The two young men went out into the darkness, not in the best of moods with each other. Their road lay for some distance together. As Cunningham was on foot, Marchmont did not mount his horse, but led him by the bridle. Some spirit of evil caused the miller to forget his conciliatory words, and call out a caution to his friend: "Take care of yourself, Cunningham." Marchmont did not hear it: Cunningham did. It did not please him, and he turned round angrily towards Heath.

The following day, in the afternoon, Heath went over to Cunningham's farm, and to his surprise found he had never made his appearance at home the previous night. The people did not seem to think much of it; the housekeeper said she supposed her master must have gone off elsewhere on sudden business. But now, five o'clock, they were beginning to grow a little anxious. The miller at once said that Mr. Cunningham had left Shirley mill the previous night with the intention of returning home. Marchmont of Drayton was with him, he added; they would do well to see if he could throw any light on the

matter. Upon this, the farm servants were sent out in different directions, the miller himself helping in the search; but no traces of the missing man could be found.

When John Heath returned home, he was full of thought: full of rage too against Marchmont. He felt convinced in his own mind that Marchmont, in his anger and vengeance, had done some harm to his rival. Not in the first moment did he dare frame his thoughts into the ugly word murder; but as he pondered the matter well over, it thus gradually settled down into his mind. And he determined to do his best to bring it home to him.

"A pretty thing has happened," he exclaimed to his daughter, as he entered the cottage. "You stand a good chance of being clipt of both your lovers, my young lady. Plenty of time you'll have, no doubt, to meditate upon your past folly."

"What do you mean?" inquired Alice.

"I have been over to Cunningham's farm, and he has never shown up since yesterday. He was last seen with Marchmont: should anything bad come out about him, Marchmont will have to bear the brunt of suspicion—and perhaps something beyond it."

"But, surely," returned Alice, indignantly, "you would not suspect Edward Marchmont of anything wrong? That would be too absurd," she added, in a quieter tone of confidence. "His noble character is too well known. No man in Drayton is more liked and respected. Suspicion cannot fall upon him."

"We shall see," replied Heath. "Many a better man than Marchmont has been ruined for a smaller matter." But he said no more.

The days passed on, and Cunningham did not turn up. Inquiry brought forth no success. It was now generally supposed that some untoward fate had overtaken him, murder or other. Yet his body had not been discovered. The river had been carefully dragged—they only disturbed the fish for their pains. Search was made in every likely and unlikely hole and corner, but nothing came to light. Edward Marchmont, the last person known to have been in his company, stated that they had parted amicably. Cunningham had held his impatient horse for him whilst he mounted; they then shook hands, wished each other good-night, and each went his way. He could tell no more. There the matter rested for the moment, as far as the world was concerned; but upon one person it was taking great effect.

And this one, as we shall easily guess, was Alice Heath. She could not believe Marchmont in any way guilty; but the manner in which her father continually brought up the subject, the doubts he was always insinuating; the open way, indeed, in which he gave it as his opinion, to her, that Marchmont had actually made away with Cunningham could but render her excessively miserable. For a whole fortnight nothing but her father's cruel words relieved the dull monotony of her life.

Edward Marchmont's visits had ceased, and she had heard but once from him during that time. He told her in that letter that he should not rest until he discovered traces of Cunningham, and she supposed the search was now occupying the whole of his time. In that one fortnight Alice changed much; she grew pale and thin; so much so that even her father began to be anxious, and to wish that the mystery would clear itself up.

One evening Alice was standing at the door looking dreamily down the road where she had so often watched for Marchmont's appearance, when an object in the distance suddenly caused her heart to stand still. Though so far off that to any one else it would have been invisible, she knew too well the faintest outline of that form to be mistaken. As it gradually drew nearer, and Marchmont came into open view, the colour that had lately quitted her cheeks suddenly returned to them, and again left her paler than before.

Edward threw himself from his horse, and in the first moment of their meeting all was forgotten save the intense joy of being once more together. Alice looked up at him, half timidly, half upbraidingly.

"Edward, why have you been so silent? I have heard from you but once during this great trouble."

"I have been working," he replied, "working night and day, in the hope of finding some clue to this mystery. I felt as if I could not write until I gave you good news; but every day it has seemed to go further from me. It is impossible for things to go on in this manner any longer. Why, my darling, you are already changed. This very day I will put an end to the uncertainty. What do you think Cunningham said to me that night, before we parted?"

"How should I know?" returned Alice, opening her eyes.

"That if you yourself frankly told him you were engaged to me, he would retire from the field."

"So that we lose much by his disappearance."

"We do, indeed, in one sense. But I begin to think your father dislikes me personally so much, that he will never willingly give me his consent."

Alice shook her head sadly. "This visit of yours will not mend matters. If ——"

At that moment Heath issued from the mill, his head down, his step measured, as if he was in deep thought. When he caught sight of Marchmont, his surprise was unbounded. He stopped short for a moment, and then asked him how he could dare show his face again on his ground after what had passed.

"I have come because I cannot help it, Mr. Heath," replied Marchmont. "This terrible business of Cunningham's is taking effect upon most of us. See how changed Alice has become in one short fortnight!"

"You have only yourself to thank for it," returned Heath. "It is a good thing for you that I cannot give you into custody; for I believe you could throw light on this matter, if you chose to do so."

"Take care, sir!" cried Marchmont, flushing red. "You have, I know, taken up a wild, unholy notion, which has in it neither sense nor foundation. The least you can do is to keep it to yourself; at any rate, in my presence. What is there about me," he continued, in a more earnest tone, "that should cause you to show this dislike to me? What have I ever done to you? If Alice and I fell in love with each other, could we help that? Can we control, in this world, our likes and dislikes; our loves and hates? Depend upon it, it was to be; and it is to ask you to give in to us, and to *let* it be, that I am now here."

"I may be wrong," observed Heath. "If so, I shall owe you some atonement. At any rate, I will look over this visit of yours once more. For to-night, come in and take tea with us. Your horse could not carry you back as fast as you have come," he added, pointing to the animal which stood near, covered with foam. "If I have no love for you, I cannot be unkind to a dumb creature."

Calling to a man who was then approaching from the mill, he ordered him to take Mr. Marchmont's horse round to the stable. And they went indoors.

"Before we proceed to other subjects," began Marchmont, "I must ask what has given rise to this suspicion against me, Mr. Heath. I should like, if possible, to set myself right with you. Until that is done, I despair of all else."

"You may perhaps manage to set yourself right with me, as you call it," replied the miller, sternly, yet with a half-smile upon his lips; "but I do not forget that you, and you alone, have brought discord into this house, and that I cannot forgive you. Admitting that you know no more of Cunningham than I do, I have a firm conviction that but for you he would now have been sitting amongst us. I mean that—unconsciously it may be—you have influenced his fate."

"In short, that I was his evil genius?" returned Marchmont.

"Something of the kind."

"I am not sufficiently learned in these matters to contradict you," replied the lawyer, some mockery in his tone. "Mysteries to me are always mysteries. If I was born to be Cunningham's evil genius—which has yet to be proved—it was through no fault or seeking of mine. My impression is, that he will turn up some day, when least expected."

"Not much hope of that," said Heath, taking his tea from Alice's hand, and stirring it viciously. "Wherever he may be, depend upon it he is not in *this* world."

It was an uncomfortable tea-table, and both Marchmont and Alice were wishing that Heath would take himself off to the mill. The shades of evening were beginning to gather in the room, and they themselves

were gradually growing more and more consciously silent, when a sudden scream from Alice, who was seated opposite the window, caused them to start. Her cheeks grew deadly pale: her eyes were strained upon some object with an expression of intense fear. Both turned sharply, and there, peering into the room, was the face, white and thin and changed, yet unmistakeable, of James Cunningham.

For a moment Marchmont veritably thought he saw a ghost, but his sober senses quickly returned to him, and he jumped up hastily from the table. Heath, for once in his life, was too petrified to speak or move. Marchmont ran to the door, opened it, and went out, just in time to see the vision moving away. He darted forward, caught it by the shoulder, and Cunningham turned round.

"You all seemed so comfortable," he murmured, deprecatingly, "I had not the heart to disturb you. I felt that I was not wanted."

"But you *are* wanted," returned Marchmont, emphatically. "Cunningham, what in the world have you been doing with yourself?"

"The story is soon told," replied Cunningham. "But if I am to come in, I may as well make one telling do for all."

They went in. Alice and Heath saw that it was really James Cunningham in the flesh, and not in the spirit. Unwelcome as he had always been to Alice, his appearance now caused her a positive joy. But she remained quietly in her seat, and spoke not a word, wondering only what the meeting would bring forth. Heath, on the contrary, started up and grasped Cunningham's hand with a grip that brought an exclamation from him.

"I cannot bear quite as much of that as when you last saw me," he said. And he held out his hand, which, once brown and thick, was now almost as white and delicate as a woman's.

"I believe it's a ghost after all," said Heath, after a moment's silent inspection of the hand and face before him.

"It might have been, but is not," replied Cunningham, smiling at Heath's evident perplexity. "I am still real flesh and blood: only diminished in quantity, that's all."

"Real skin and bones," cried Heath. "Then you were not really murdered?"

"Who was fool enough to set that story afloat?" returned Cunningham, with a touch of his old manner. "Surely not you, Mr. Heath?"

"Not only that," said Alice, who was in a state between laughing and crying, "but he even went so far as to point out certain persons as likely to have harmed you."

Heath looked across at Marchmont, as if asking him to keep silence. He was not frank enough to come forward and beg his forgiveness of the wrong he had done him.

"I guess all about it," said Cunningham. "But for the present we will pass this over, and go on to other matters. As you thought me

murdered, you will be anxious to learn what really became of me. It is a short story. First of all you must know, Mr. Heath, that Marchmont and I separated better friends than we were when we left you. And this was partly owing to your caution, given as we were starting. It suddenly struck me that you were carrying things rather too far. For my own part I was thoroughly uncomfortable, and I did not intend to remain so much longer. Thus it happened, that far from having murderous intentions towards each other, we were in a fair way of becoming friendly. After parting with Marchmont I thought, as the night was so fine, and not ten o'clock, I'd do an errand I wanted over at Dovedale; like a fool, I took the way through the forest, and missed the road. What queer, lonely part I got out at I didn't know. Supposing it would lead me right, I went on like a traveller who gives the reins to his horse, and allows him to go as he will. To tell you the truth, things had vexed me, and I was lost in thought. It was not pleasant to be recalled to one's senses by a sharp knock on the head. I got it, however. And then a second."

"From a robber!" breathlessly interposed Alice.

"Something of the sort, Miss Heath: since my watch, and all else of value about me, was stolen. With the second blow I lost consciousness, and there I lay. After a bit, I suppose I came to, but I found myself too weak and dizzy, from the loss of blood, to stand. About a couple of hundred yards in front of me I saw a light shining, and dragged myself to it. It turned out to be a small cottage dwelling, and I knocked for admittance. The door was opened by a young, good-looking woman, whom I afterwards found to be half French and half English. She had but lately come into the neighbourhood, and was living in this cottage with one little maid-servant. I had barely time to ask for shelter when I again lost consciousness. As I afterwards knew, the young woman put me into her own bed—herself sleeping with her maiden in the next small room as long as I remained—dressed my wounds, and sat up with me all night. The next morning I was in a fever; delirious; and continued so for six days. Then I fell into a deep sleep, from which I woke to consciousness, but so weak that I was unable to speak, and cared not to imagine what had come to me. Now, thanks to a sound constitution and good nursing, I am getting over it, and came out this afternoon for the first time."

"It is like a romance," murmured Alice. "Your nurse must be a good woman."

"I don't feel very like a hero," laughed Cunningham. "But I cordially agree with your opinion of my nurse. And when——"

"But if you have been in your senses for more than a week, how is it that you've not let us know about you sooner?" interrupted the more practical miller.

"I didn't see there was so much hurry about the matter," was Cun

ningham's answer. "Weak as a rat, it troubled me to think of things. I was very comfortable where I was."

"That's cool," said the miller. "And people outside thinking you were murdered, Cunningham!"

"But how was I to suppose that?" argued Cunningham. "As to home, I knew the bailiff could manage without me, and I didn't care to be disturbed and bothered. I had the kindest nurse in the world; the best, gentlest woman poor sick man was ever tended by, with the voice and face of an angel. And how do you think I am going to reward her goodness to me, Mr. Heath?"

"How can I tell. By giving her a pension, perhaps?"

"Something more than a pension. But the reward falls back upon myself. I am going to make her my wife."

"Nonsense," cried the miller, starting up. "You can't do that, you know, without breaking your word with me. I would forbid your marriage."

"Try it on," returned Cunningham, quietly. "Whilst I was lying there too ill to speak, I managed to think a good deal: a thing I was never given to before. And I came to the conclusion that I was only half a man—nothing but a bear in fact—for having annoyed Alice so long with my unwelcome presence. And I did know that I was unwelcome to her, friend Heath, though not to the extent that came out that last night. I made up my mind, lying there, to throw it all over as soon as I got up, and leave the coast clear for Marchmont."

"And you'll take up with some French stranger that you know nothing about!" exclaimed the aggravated miller.

"You're mistaken," returned Cunningham: "I know all about her. And she's not French: it was her mother. Only wait until you see her thousand virtues and beauties. She'll make me a good wife, Heath," he added, emphatically; "my fireside a happy one. She told me her history, a long story that does her nothing but honour, and I have seen one of her brothers. So you see, Miss Alice, I am booked after all. I hope you will forgive me any past unpleasantness, and I very much hope that you and my future wife will be lasting friends."

He went up to her and held out his hand. Alice clasped it warmly. Heath felt the ground was slipping from under his feet. He now had them all against him. The only revenge he had ready was to still refuse to give Marchmont his consent.

"You may get the better of me in this instance," he cried; "but you shall not in the other. Sooner than allow my daughter to marry Marchmont, I will sell up everything, and take her off to America."

"This is nonsense," returned Cunningham. "You are now spiting yourself, Mr. Heath. You owe Marchmont some reparation for your unjust suspicions. Don't make yourselves all miserable, but give them your consent—like a good man and true."

"Never, as long as I live," replied Heath, holding out, in his temper, like an old bull-dog. "And after I'm dead, I'll make it a condition in my will, or she shall have nothing."

But the bull-dog gave in at last. Cunningham reasoned, Marchmont pleaded, Alice sat at a distance and softly cried. Over an hour the battle lasted, Heath growing crosser and crosser, and giving the consent with a final snarl.

"And now that you've got it," he cried, as he rose to leave the room, "the sooner you're married and I'm quit of you the better. But understand, I'll not be at the marriage."

Some three months later a double wedding took place in the village of Shirley. Of the one we need say but little. It was evident that Cunningham had improved since his engagement in many ways, and the bride he led to the altar seemed the very wife suited to him. Of the other, perhaps all that need be told is that Alice was given away by her father, who had become more than reconciled to the lawyer, Marchmont. It would be hard to say how Marchmont and Alice looked; both were quiet from intense happiness; but as Marchmont walked up the little church his step was prouder, his eyes were brighter than they had ever been. He felt very thankful for the victory they had so hardly won.

For a whole week the mill stopped working: there was silence in the beautiful valley, save for the rippling of the flowing waters, and the whispering of the trees. After that it went whirling on again, harder and louder than ever: and people say that the miller is trying to make a fortune equal to the one he lost in James Cunningham.



THE KNIGHT'S TOMB.

HERE in the old side-chapel, calmly lying
 With hands crossed meekly as a sign of grace,
 And ruby gleams from yon rich window, dyeing
 The cold white pallor of his sculptured face ;
 He sleepeth well ; the tender light hath crowned him
 With a dim aureole of golden mist ;
 And the grey shadows ever shifting round him,
 Are touched by changeful tints of amethyst.
 Day after day the deep prayer-music pealing
 Through mighty arches, rolls above his breast ;
 And flute-like notes from boyish voices stealing,
 Seem but to lull him into calmer rest.
 But who can tell the passion and the anguish,
 The long, sad watch that came before the sleep ?
 How often did his knightly spirit languish
 In the stern vigil it was doomed to keep !
 The sword and shield in deadly fight were dented
 Ere Death's low tones might bid the conflict cease,
 And God's white Angel with a touch imprinted
 On that worn brow His seal of perfect peace.
 And we the living, who with quiet paces
 Come here to gaze upon his marble bed,
 Bringing our restless hearts and care-lined faces
 So near the hallowed slumber of the dead ;
 We too, must know the striving and the failing,
 The daily war with unrelenting foes,
 Until by Heaven's might at last prevailing
 We gain the victory, and earn repose :
 Resting, until the trump of resurrection
 Awakes us at the Lord's appointed hour,
 And our own bodies clad in full perfection,
 Once sown in weakness, shall be raised in power.
 First the long strife—the sleep—and then the waking,
 The sudden change from peace to ecstasy,
 When we, the image of our Maker taking
 Shall wear His likeness through eternity.

SARAH DOUDNEY.

FEATHERS AND SPANGLES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

THE room was small and bright. Window-curtains of crimson cloth shut out the cold and the twilight, quickly gathering over the worn grass, the bare trees of the London square. The fire and the lamp burned clearly; books lined a portion of the walls; an easy-chair stood empty on one side the soft hearth-rug, inviting to repose when the clergyman should have finished his sermon. He had drawn the table near the fire, and was busy with it.

It was a picture of home-comfort and peace, this study: imparting the notion that its owner must be one of those fortunate men who are secure from the frowns of a biting world. The Reverend Septimus Winter liked comfort, and hoped to enjoy a fair share of it to his life's end. He was a tall, good-looking man of thirty-one, hair and eyes dark. Good-looking in so far as that the features were handsome; but they had a somewhat severe expression. The house was still and tranquil. His little boy's voice in laughter broke out occasionally in the nursery above; but Mr. Winter did not count that as disturbance; it was what he, a doting father, liked to hear. Claude Beckett, a neighbour's son, had come in to play with Harry. Mr. Winter wrote on steadily. This was Saturday, and his sermon must be achieved.

In a moment this tranquillity became alarmingly interrupted. A pistol was fired off almost—as it seemed—in the very ear of Mr. Winter; it was followed by a shrill cry from Harry. Almost beside himself with terror, apprehending he knew not what calamity, the clergyman started up and rushed from the room. The first sight his eyes caught was that of the two children half-way up the stairs—Master Claude Beckett with a small pistol in his hand. He was a daring gentleman of six, just double Harry's age. Servants were running up the stairs with affrighted faces. Mrs. Winter came out of her bed-room, whiter than death, a baby clasped in her arms.

There was plenty of terror, but no injury; for the pistol had not been charged. When this much was ascertained, and the first agony of fear had subsided, Mr. Winter got at the particulars. The two boys, left alone temporarily in the nursery, had strolled into Jack Winter's room, and discovered the pistol; upon which Master Claude Beckett was seized with an irresistible desire to let it off. The bright idea occurred to him that he might combine this pleasure with a fright for his household; and he carried it to the stairs that the report might be

better heard. The boy's father was a sportsman ; he knew all about it, and his own fingers were strong.

Mr. Winter, a hot man—for clergymen cannot put away their nature any more than other people—went into a passion. Not with Claude Beckett—though he had difficulty in keeping his correcting hands off that young offender—but with his brother Jack. Jack the Scapegrace. For a long while Mr. Winter had hardly *borne* with him : this was the climax. A pistol ! A pistol in his bedroom, when there were children in the house !

"Mr. Jack have had it there this week past," spoke up a maid-servant amidst the general confusion ; "he keeps it in a locked-up case, sir."

"It appears he keeps it where my children can get at it, locked up or not locked up," angrily retorted the clergyman, biting his tongue to keep down harder words. And in that moment he knew for certain a fact he had been gradually suspecting : that he had grown to *hate* Jack.

Master Claude Beckett was conveyed home in disgrace ; Harry, screaming enough to frighten the London crows (not easily frightened, one would imagine), was consigned to an ignominious bed forthwith ; and Mr. Winter went into his wife's chamber. She sat by the fire ; a plain, sensible-looking woman, in delicate health, hushing the baby in her arms.

"I am afraid this disgraceful occurrence has frightened you, Emily."

"Well, it did at the time ; but I don't mind it now I know the boys are safe," was Mrs. Winter's answer. "The worst was, it woke up Florence with a start, and I had but just succeeded in getting her off to sleep."

She pulled the small square of fine flannel off the child's face, and disclosed a delicate little blossom of five or six months old, who looked as if its short days on earth were already numbered.

"It is a great pity she was woke up ; sleep is so necessary for her," sighed Mrs. Winter. "The doctor says it is more to her now than food."

Yes, it was a great pity : Mr. Winter echoed the words in his thoughts. His whole heart was set upon the rearing of this frail little girl, Florence ; and, man of peace though he was by profession, his will was good just then to have pitched Jack and his pistol into the sea, had the sea been handy for it.

Going back to his study, he shut the door with a bang, drew the easy-chair in front of the fire, and sat down in it, leaving his sermon to complete itself. If the worst came to the worst, he could preach an old one. A resolution that had long been seeking an opportunity to get put into practice, grew fixed and firm.

And yet, even in that moment of irritation, when his nature was at its hardest, a qualm of hesitation crossed his conscience, and he sought to show himself that his pretext was a right one. Looking into the

fire, he recalled the past years ; they seemed to be glowing there as in a painted tableau.

He had loved his mother. If Septimus Winter had never loved anything else on earth, he had loved her. She was the widow of a poor naval officer ; struggling to bring up her two children well on her small means. It was not very difficult in the cheap country village where they lived. The boys were named Septimus and John (called Jack always) : there were eleven years between them. Septimus succeeded in getting to college and was ordained for a clergyman. He was steady industrious, persevering. A year or two of hard work, of patient hope of heavy parish duties, and of semi-starvation, and Septimus was appointed to something better in a London suburb. The charge of a church was given him, whose incumbent felt no longer able, through ill-health, to retain it. There was no parish work, no poor to visit, nothing but the Sunday's duty ; and Mr. Winter, compared with the past, had an easy life of it. The new fashion of young curates holding daily services had not come in then, or there's no knowing but he would have drifted into it. He began to think that he might turn his weekly leisure to account by setting up a boys' school. He got the promise of a few : but he had neither money, nor furniture, nor housekeeper ; and he went down home to consult his mother. The result was that she had her goods and chattels packed up, and went to London. Jack had just gone indoor apprentice to the village apothecary, and Mrs. Winter was at liberty to dispose of herself.

The school flourished tolerably. It was some struggle and hard work, but both mother and son threw their best energies into it, and more than a year passed on. Then Mrs. Winter died. While she was full of plans for the future, saying "We will do this for the school, we will do that," she died. It does not do to transplant old people from a life's home, and perhaps the change had been imperceptibly killing Mrs. Winter. She seemed to die of a mere nothing : a cold settled on the chest ; three or four days of bed, and she was gone. Only a few hours before her death did any one suspect the danger. Mr. Winter was correcting some exercises in the school-room, after the boys had gone to rest for the night, when a maid came to tell him his mother seemed worse, and he hastened up.

"I have left my furniture to you, Septimus," she said ; "it is all I have to leave. Of course, Jack has a right to half of it ; but it could not be taken out of your house ; and there's the wear and tear. You'll find my will in one of those drawers. I wrote it out myself ; but I dare say it is legal enough. As a recompense to Jack, you must give him a home and a bit and a sup when he comes up to walk the hospitals ; I think this is the best I can do for both of you : and God bless you always, my dear sons !"

She died before the night was over, and there was no time to

send for Jack. He did not even come for the funeral. Fever was raging in the village, his master was sick, and Jack had to stay where he was. He was of a somewhat careless nature, and did not take it to heart as Septimus would have done. With *him*, everything he cared for in life seemed to have flown away with his mother.

The world is made up of changes. Down one day, up the next. In less than a twelvemonth after his mother's death, the Reverend Septimus Winter had gone up five hundred degrees in the scale of prosperity's ladder. He had married a wife with a good fortune; he had been appointed to the incumbency of an excellent living in London; he had disposed of his school profitably. Henceforth he was above the frowns of the world, and the chances were that the sudden rise to prosperity would spoil him. Few men living had a larger amount of self-esteem than he. He liked to stand well with those above him; he was strangely ambitious at heart. Could he have been brought to confess all his thoughts and aspirations, the talismanic word "mitre" would have been found amidst them, glittering in a golden aureole.

By the time Jack came up to London, all traces of the old home-life had been done away. Mr. Winter's house was a handsome one in a fine square, and Jack felt half afraid to tread on the velvet carpets. The few poor things that were their mother's (but which had nevertheless well served the turn of the elder brother), were lost and hidden amid the more sumptuous furniture. Perhaps a shade of annoyance crossed the clergyman's mind at having to welcome Jack as an inmate of his well-appointed home; but he never thought of going from his bargain. His wife, who was kindly-natured, said she was glad to have him.

Jack was nineteen then: a good-tempered, thoughtless, handsome young fellow, swayed with every breath of wind. He fell into very irregular habits: medical students are—what they are; and poor Jack Winter was thrown amidst a very bad set of them. He took to come home at irregular hours; he lay a-bed of a morning; once, when the clergyman and Mrs. Winter were entertaining a baronet's widow, a doctor of divinity, and other great ones of the neighbourhood, Jack was seen in the drawing-room corner, blinking like an owl and the worse for drink.

"I fear we have neglected him," said Mrs. Winter thoughtfully, when the party broke up, and her husband felt fit to flay Jack alive. "We have not *encouraged* him to be with us in an evening, but have let him go his own way. It has been a mistake."

Even so. The clergyman, not best pleased to have Jack in the house at all, had winked at his taking to spend his evenings away from home. A little out of his element in the grand home, and suspecting that his company was not wished for, Jack, in the first instance, went out to relieve them of it; and so dropped into undesirable company. Mr.

Winter, always a steady man himself, made no allowance for his brother, but grew more dissatisfied and bitter day by day.

He sat by the fire now, making much of the resolve that had been silently ripening—to turn Jack from the house this self-same night, converting the pistol into a pretext. A reprobate (it was what he called him in his thoughts), in *his* respectable house! setting a miserable example to his little son Harry; liable to be talked of by the irreproachable square, which boasted of ladies of title and divine D.D.'s! Mr. Winter's brow grew hot with shame at the thought. Jack had received an offer, as he happened to know, from some general practitioner living in Lambeth, to go to him as out-door assistant from nine to nine, and receive fifty pounds a-year. Let him take that. Fifty pounds was enough for a single man to live upon.

The fire was getting low. As Mr. Winter rose to replenish it, he heard the hall-door open; and Jack came up the stairs, singing softly the refrain of that old disreputable song, "Buffalo Girls." Not perhaps that the song is so particularly disreputable in itself; but the Reverend Mr. Winter, a clergyman and man of correct habits, regarded all such as most scandalizing, when heard within his sacred walls. It was sung so low that he had to hold his breath to distinguish either words or tune; for, to give Jack credit for something, it must be owned that he remembered the sick baby when going up or down stairs.

"Oh, Buffalo girls, won't you come out to-night,
And dance by the light of the moon?"

Open went the study-door with a fling; and Jack, arrested in his upward progress, was authoritatively motioned into it. He was a young man of twenty; a pleasing likeness of Mr. Winter. Both of them had the same handsome cast of features and bright brown eyes, but Jack's face bore a milder expression. A phrenologist, looking at him, would say he had no strength of mind or will, but was easily persuadable as a child. He wore a rough coat, out of which the bowl of a pipe was sticking behind. Rough coats and pipes were especially obnoxious to Mr. Winter (the latter Jack had never been allowed to set a light to in the house), and the sight of them did not now tend to propitiate him.

There had been some cutting reprimands to Jack before; but never had Mr. Winter attacked him as he did now. Just a sharp short sentence or two, his face white with passion.

"The pistol was not loaded," said Jack, in his pleasant voice. "There was nothing to load it with, either. It couldn't do any harm. Might have killed young Harry? Nonsense, Septimus. What business—if it comes to that—has young Harry to go unlocking the places in my room?"

This was adding insult to injury: and Mr. Winter could have struck

his brother in his rage. In his superior age and wisdom, the other seemed no better than a boy to him. What he said he hardly knew; words that at a calmer moment he had certainly never uttered. Jack was told what an unwelcome intruder he had been, nothing but a burden; and was bid to go forth that same night before he was an hour older, and shift for himself for the future.

For a moment Jack stood as one stunned. But of course there could be no appeal against the mandate, even had he felt inclined to make any. The house was his brother's; and he had been, in truth, but an interloper in it.

"Very well, Septimus," he said, calmly acquiescent. "I'll just put my things together, and send for them when I know where I shall have a ceiling to put them under."

"You need be at no fault for that," retorted Mr. Winter. "The situation you spoke of is open. Had fifty pounds a year been offered to me when I was your age, I should have thought it Fortune, and saved out of it."

"Ah, yes, no doubt."

Jack went upstairs, treading softly. It did not take a quarter of an hour to "put his things together." They were bundled into his small portmanteau and the big sea-chest that used to be his father's—which sea-chest had been deemed too shabby for Septimus, the clergyman, to take to, and so it fell to Jack. Jack treaded the things down after the most approved bachelor fashion, and so got both receptacles locked. There was no room for the pistol-case, or for all his books; he went down carrying some of them in his hands and stuffing his pockets.

When he passed Mrs. Winter's room, the door was open. Seeing her standing there, Jack looked in.

"How is dear little Florence to-night?" he asked, in a whisper; for he saw the child asleep in the cot.

"Is it you, Jack? I don't see any difference. Come in and look at her."

Jack Winter loved this child dearly. With all his failings, he had a tender heart. Leaning over the cot, he watched it sleeping its calm, infant's sleep. That they would never succeed in rearing the child, he felt sure of: his professional eyes saw things clearer than his brother. Bending down, he kissed its little fingers again and again—a last farewell.

"I am very sorry about the pistol, Mrs. Winter," he said, joining her as she stood at the fire. "There was no real danger; of course, I should not have been so carelessly stupid as to risk that; but I am vexed it should have alarmed you. Good bye!"

"Why, where are you going, Jack?" she exclaimed, yielding her hand to him.

"Septimus and I are parting. We have not pulled quite well together, as I dare say you know; so perhaps it is all for the best. Good

bye ! and thank you very truly for the house-room and all else you have given me."

He was out of the room and down the stairs before she had recovered her surprise, or could ask further explanation. She went to her husband's study to seek it, and found it empty. Mr. Winter had gone out.

But he was back again shortly, for it was the dinner-hour. He had but stepped out to get a mouthful of fresh air after his discomposure, and perhaps to avoid further encounter with that ill-doing youth, his brother. When Mrs. Winter inquired about Jack, he replied that he could not have him in the house any longer.

"Oh, Septimus, he is so young to be thrown on this wicked London world !" was her involuntary remonstrance. "Without a home ! What will he do for a home, and for a living ?"

"He has got both open to him," curtly returned Mr. Winter ; for no man brooked even the shadow of a reproof less than he. "He will have fifty pounds a year to begin with. Had I got that at his age, Emily—as I told him—I should have thought Fortune had come to me, and saved out of it. Jack is all right ; and the sooner he feels he must earn his own bread-and-cheese the better."

They went in to dinner, Mrs. Winter dismissing the subject with the fish. She always supposed her husband knew best, and yielded to his judgment in everything.

He thought he did know best ; he said to himself that he had done the proper thing. Jack must be made to find his own value as a single unit amid the many millions in the world ; to feel the necessity that lay on him to spend his days in work—not in junketing, and smoking, and idleness. And the Reverend Septimus Winter was so satisfied with the relief of finding his house once more free, that he felt light as a bird emancipated from an imprisoning cage, and took an extra glass of his good wine in very hilarity of heart.

And never once throughout the actual dismissal, had the remembrance of his mother occurred to him, or how she and he in the old, old days had both loved Jack.

Twelve years elapsed. Twelve years ! A vast period of time to look forward to ; not much to glance back upon, when they present but a wide track of unbroken smoothness, as they did to the retrospect of the Reverend Septimus Winter. He had done nothing but go up and up in prosperity's scale. He had another living added to his rich one ; he was an honorary canon of some cathedral or other (and a very great honour it appeared to a man of his turn of mind) ; his name stood high with the world, socially and clerically ; he was regarded as one of the saintly divines of the day, quite a beacon-light. He fully believed it, and was puffed up with vain-glory.

There had been one care—one intense disappointment—Mr. and Mrs. Winter were childless. The delicate little blossom, Florence, had aded soon : and strong, troublesome, indulged Harry a couple of years afterwards. How keen the grief to Mr. Winter had been, he alone knew ; how bitter the disappointment at finding, as time went on, that his wife had no more children, he would have been ashamed to tell of. He had got over it all now ; had ceased almost to regret it ; his affections were set on the substantial good of the world and on the ambition growing rife and more rife within him. Men—and women too—must possess an object in life. Mr. Winter sometimes preached from his pulpit the desirability of that object being Heaven : Heaven alone : but he had not made it his yet. He thought the bishopric he coveted was advancing nearer, and his heart glowed within him.

But he was a good man, as the world—aye, and as many not of the world—would count goodness. Charitable, humane, active in the service of religion, denouncing sinners, upholding the righteous. What though he was ambitious ? though he saw in dreams that mitre perched right atop of his head ?—To him it seemed quite a right and legitimate ambition ; shared by at least (under the rose, be it spoken) quite half the advanced members of the Church. He did his full duty to everybody while he looked patiently out for the mitred crown, treading his way in spiritual pride, making much of his really good qualities. Had anybody suggested to Mr. Winter that it was just possible he might not be on quite the right track for Heaven—the track taught by Christ—he would have put them down complacently for their impertinence.

And Jack ? Jack had never been seen by Mr. and Mrs. Winter, scarcely been heard of, since the Saturday night that he kissed the baby's hand in farewell (fearing to wake her if he kissed her face), and went out with his books and his pistol. On the Monday a porter brought a barrow for the sea-chest and portmanteau. Mr. Winter was out at the time, or he might have asked where they were to be taken to ; or he might not. In the elation of heart caused by the riddance of his house from so undesirable an inmate, Mr. Winter was quite content to let things be as they were. He was of rather a close nature, and it was a great thing to be relieved of the third at table. Perhaps it may be more correct to say selfish, instead of close ; since he grudged nothing that could contribute to his own enjoyment and his wife's ; but he grudged the cost of an interloper.

It might have been about two months after the little baby had left them, when Harry had become doubly precious, if that were possible, that Mrs. Winter, sitting at her window and looking out on the budding trees of the square, asked her husband after Jack. In answer, Mr. Winter broke into a tirade touching Jack's ingratitude—never to have called upon them ; never to have as much as written a line of

thanks for hospitality shown! "He thanked me," said Mrs. Winter. "He didn't thank me," said the clergyman. "Where is he?" she resumed. "Down at that place in Lambeth; there can't be a doubt of it," confidently asserted Mr. Winter; "but for keeping that, or some other situation, we should have had him sponging back on us." "Septimus," she said, after a pause, "I think I would go and see him, if I were you. Perhaps it may be a duty. He has come into my mind so often of late—I don't know why—that it has made me think a great deal of him. He is but twenty, you know; too young to be left quite without friends or counsel; go you and see him." Mr. Winter a little resented the advice; but, after taking plenty of time for consideration, followed it.

It was one of spring's brightest mornings when Mr. Winter set out, inviting to a walk, and perhaps there lay the chief inducement. Treading the streets with his usual self-important tread, in his superfine clerical garments, he went inquiring about Lambeth, address in hand. It was in an obscure and very populous part of it, where men and women walked about in tatters, and impudent children tumbled over each other in the gutters, that he came to an anchor. The house was a small surgery and chemist's combined, the proprietor uniting both professions. It crossed the Reverend Mr. Winter's mind to turn back again, there and then; he had no wish to claim a brother of his in such company. But he did go in, and saw the surgeon himself, making up pills behind the counter.

Mr. John Winter? Oh, ay, the young man who had written for particulars of the situation. He made his appearance one Saturday night, unexpectedly, thinking to enter upon it; but the place was filled up he had been too long deciding.

Such was the substance of the answer. Mr. Winter enquired if he knew where Jack had gone to, or where he was then; but the doctor could give him no information whatever. So he went home again and told his wife. Jack had withdrawn from the hospital, and was not to be heard of there.

"He will come to us fast enough when he wants anything," remarked Mr. Winter, dismissing the subject with lofty summariness, as if it contained some kind of contamination. And from that hour to this he had never renewed it, never sought to find Jack; had in truth almost forgotten him. It is so easy in prosperity to hold a satisfied conscience.

So the clergyman went complacently on his prosperous way, a rising light; and his once delicate wife had grown into established health; a woman portly and comfortable to look upon.

It was at this period, just twelve years after Jack's departure, that a blow fell on Mr. Winter. In the full zenith of his pride and power, before a silver thread had mingled with his luxuriant brown hair, or a wrinkle crossed his handsome face, he was stricken suddenly all but to

death. Driving his spirited horses in the park, amidst the great people of the land (none greater in self-importance than he), his wife by his side, his two servants behind, there arose an accident. In turning by Apsley House something fretted or frightened the horses; they dashed at the gate, and the carriage was overturned. Mrs. Winter and the servants were not hurt, to speak of; Mr. Winter lay as he fell. He was conveyed home, and those of the faculty most eminent in name and skill were speedily gathered round his bed. His right leg was broken; and, worse still, there was some inward injury. Dangerous symptoms supervened, and Septimus Winter lay face to face with death.

No one living can realize what such a position must be, unless brought personally unto it. For three weeks Mr. Winter's life hovered in the balance; not knowing, one hour of that time, but the next he should be called to meet his Maker. The medical men, in obedience to his wish, had informed him of his true state; and without reluctance. What need, thought they, to hide it from so saintly a pilgrim, whose reputation for holiness and good works at least equalled that of the Archbishop of Canterbury? Mr. Winter listened to the possible fiat: and he knew that it was God's fiat, not man's.

His mind, intellect, passions, judgment, were sound as ever they had been; the injuries affected not them: nay, perhaps his faculties were but the keener for the quiescence of body. "Set thy house in order; for thou shalt die and not live," was the sentence ever surging in his brain. He had read it often to his flock: but now alas! it had come home to him—*come home to him*: and in letters of fire!

He was not fit to die: he knew it quite well, lying there in his mental agony. There could be no tampering then with conscience; and it seemed that, for him, there was not any balm invented to heal its stings. He, the morally good and self-righteous man, who had stood on a lofty pinnacle to teach and guide other souls, saw things now in their true colours. God had shown him his sin.

Oh, of what value now was all the prosperity he had put his trust in? The riches he had striven for, the pomp and pride of life, the mitre looming in the distance—he turned from them with loathing and abhorrence: the pursuit of them had been but a snare and a delusion, for he could not carry them along with him to the grave. He knew—he *knew* that his heart had been set on these, and not on Heaven.

But the one great weight was his brother. His hardness of heart in regard to Jack was brought home to him in a marked and special manner. Quite at the first there was some slight delirium; during which present events were obliterated, and he was back in the past. It was on the second evening after the accident, that he subsided at dusk into a delirious dose. He thought he was at their old home in the country village; he and his mother and Jack. They seemed to be parting; that he, Septimus, was going forth to try his fortune in the world—as in

reality he had done. His mother held his hands in hers, all his old intense love for her was working within him : it seemed that she had given him some great help at a cost to herself, to get him on. Little Jack stood by, looking up with his bright brown eyes, his ready smile ; and his mother suddenly released one of her hands and laid it on Jack's shoulder, as if presenting the lad to him. " I leave him to you," she said ; " take care of him and bring him to me hereafter." And he put his own hand out to Jack and accepted the charge. Just then some crash awoke the sick man—it was but a gust of wind against the window panes—and he started in wild fear. For a few blessed moments he thought the dream was reality—that he was back in that dear old village, and only just entering on life. As the truth revealed itself, and he remembered that his mother was dead, he a great man in the world Jack nowhere, a groan burst from him. How had he fulfilled his mother's wishes?—for she *had* left Jack to him—what should he say when he met her?—And the meeting must be at hand, if indeed he was crossing the threshold of this world ! When the nurse, hearing the groan, glided to the bedside, the patient's face looked livid as with some mortal terror.

That it was this vivid dream that in the first instance caused the remorse to set in with so intense an agony, there could be no doubt of. Conscience, awakened by his position, could not have failed to bring Jack before him with a terrible reprisal ; but not perhaps as he was brought now. Whether dream or delirium, Septimus Winter believed that it had come direct from God : and the words " I will require of thee thy brother's soul," seemed to be mingling ever with others in his ears. He wondered now whether his own children had been taken from him in requital.

The three weeks of hovering on the verge of death came to an end, and there was a faint change for the better : the doctors then said that he might recover, not that he would. How many more weeks he lay when the issue was still doubtful, he ceased to count. The bodily pain was not much : it was the mental. All that while it seemed to be nothing but one never-ceasing struggle with God—like unto Jacob's prolonged wrestling with the angel until break of day.

It is a period that cannot be talked of—when a man is brought thus before God, and shown his sin. If Septimus Winter had never previously realized the truth of that wonderful parable, the Pharisee and the Publican, he did now. What though the poor publican had killed and rioted and stolen, his guilt was nothing as compared with that of the self-righteous pharisee : and verily it appeared to the clergyman that the worst sinner of this bad London world was nearer heaven than he.

A firm conviction lay upon him that Jack was dead : it seemed to be as much a certainty as though he had known it. Hence the bar that lay between him and peace. Every time he would have raised his

feeble hands to plead for Christ's atoning blood, his brother's remembrance came between. There seemed to be pardon for the whole world; except him. If Jack had died in sin, unredeemed, how could he, who had driven him to it, ask for forgiveness? Over and over and over again would he have thanked God for showing him his sin; but that it must lie with so heavy a weight on his soul, and he could not dare to hope for pardon. All that he could say—say day after day and night after night, the groans bursting from his miserable heart, the tears gushing from his eyes—was the despairing cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

In time; in time—he knew not how it could be, he saw not how it was possible, except that God's ways are not as our ways—he began to experience a taste of peace; to think that even he might be forgiven.

Never was there a man so changed as he, when he at length rose up from his weary bed. Thinner and weaker of course in frame, and he would limp a little all his life; but the change lay not in that. It was in his manner. The rather pompous and self-contained man, with a clear voice and speech that the world could not ruffle, had become subdued, humble, meek as a little child. Heart and conscience alike ached always; ached to pain.

As soon as he was sufficiently strong, he instituted a search for Jack. In every quarter presenting but the faintest probability of hearing of him, did the clergyman inquire. He looked up Jack's former companions, disreputable young medical students twelve years ago; he wrote to his native village; he put advertisements in the second column of *The Times*, and in other papers. Nothing came of it. He never much expected that anything would come of it. The mental conviction that Jack was dead, had not decreased one iota; but he sought to find the possible consolation of hearing that he had died in peace.

At length, when he had given up all hope of ever finding traces of Jack, they came. The medical man in Lambeth (for he had been one of those first applied to), perceiving Mr. Winter's anxiety on the point, had good-naturedly promised to keep his eyes open, and let him know if any tidings transpired. One morning, when the clergyman was sitting listlessly by the fire—he was not yet capable of active employment—this gentleman was shown in. He came to say that he thought the question was at last set at rest, and Jack found.

"Alive or dead?" asked Mr. Winter, in his subdued tone; but his heart was beating so fast that he could scarcely put the question.

"Dead. About six years ago."

There was a long pause. The doctor proceeded to tell how he had gained these tidings: through a poor patient he was attending; a man who had once been a cab-proprietor, but was reduced to be only a driver. In this man's room the doctor had happened to pick up an old medical pamphlet, on the cover of which was written "Jack W." It

brought to his mind Jack Winter. He made inquiries, and found that a young man, commonly known by the name of Jack, had lodged in the cabman's house some six years ago, and died there. By the description he concluded it must have been Jack Winter.

"I have brought the man with me," said the doctor. "I thought it would be more satisfactory to you to see and question him, than to hear about it at second-hand. He is waiting in the hall. I cannot stay myself, for I am pressed for time this morning; and perhaps you would rather see him alone."

"One moment," gasped Mr. Winter, laying his trembling fingers on the doctor's sleeve, to detain him. "Was the death a happy one?"

"Well, no; I am afraid not."

The medical man went out and the driver came in—a short man in a fustian coat, with a respectful manner, and the traces of illness on his face. Mr. Winter bid him to a seat by the fire.

He knew what he had come to tell, and told it. When he (the speaker) was better off than he was now, and had a little house of his own, a young man came to lodge in its spare room. He called himself "Jack;" nothing else. He had been in the physic line; a doctor, they thought; but something or other had kept him down (perhaps ill-conduct), and he had no means of living then, so far as they knew, except selling his things. In less than a month after he came to them he died; died of drink. The age, description, manner, all tallied with Jack.

"Did you never hear him mention any other name?" questioned Mr. Winter.

"No, sir. We looked amid the few things he left after his death, but couldn't find no trace of what he'd been or who he belonged to. They wasn't worth five shillings; he had parted with all for drink; and the parish buried him."

A keen pang shot through Mr. Winter's heart; not at the ignominy of the burial—he had learnt to think *that* of no moment whatever—but at the miserable desertion in which he had died.

"There was one or two torn books and tracts—medical tracts, I mean, sir," resumed the speaker, and in all of them was writ the name, 'Jack W.' They got torn up for fire-lighting afterwards; all but one of the tracts and how that come to be saved I don't know; but my wife sometimes stows things away without knowing it. Looking for some rag in a box the other day, when the doctor was there, she turned it out; and he, seeing it concerned physic, picked it up."

He had brought it with him. It was a treatise on some branch of medical science that had made a noise in the world some six or seven years before. The clergyman carried it to the window, studying the "Jack W." At first he did not think it was Jack's writing; then he fancied it was like what Jack's would be if he lost nerve.

"This seems to have been written with a shaking hand."

"And his shook always, sir ; shook with drink. A great pity it was, to see a nice young fellow, not much better than a boy, destroying himself by inches. My wife once asked him where he thought he should go to ; but he scoffed at all thoughts of that sort."

"Then he did not die in penitence ? in peace ?" faltered the clergyman.

"He died as he had lived, sir ; swearing at the world and defying Heaven."

It was all told. When left alone, Septimus Winter buried his burning brow from the blessed sunlight, and wondered how he should live on with his despair.

Drums are beating, trumpets blowing, voices shouting. "Mareschino's Circus" has taken root upon the plain, and the town's natives are agog with wonder. It seemed to have sprung up in the night, like a mushroom, the wide, circular tent, with sawdust inside and caravans out ; but to arrive in the night, and get things up by morning, was Mareschino's way of taking the world by surprise.

The procession had gone round the town in all the blaze and glory of marvellous horses, coaches of glass and gilding, music playing, ladies and gentlemen in feathers and spangles. A sweet child of seven was in the midst of it, on a sort of platform propelled by invisible wheels, that perhaps might belong to human bodies : from which elevation she distributed handbills to the populace, in a manner that might have been strangely graceful but for its shrinking timidity. The procession had got back now, and the ladies and gentlemen were sunning themselves on the platform over the entrance, to the exceeding admiration of the excited crowd ; the little girl standing in front and handing down the bills as before. She wore a blue gauze frock studded with silver stars, and white satin shoes ; blue ribbons binding back her flowing brown hair. Never had a sweeter face been seen in a circus, or out of it ; never a more refined, modest manner than the child displayed. The band struck up, "Haste to the Wedding," and the handbills dropped in showers.

"Oh, do take us ! Do take us, Uncle Winter !"

In his failing health and energies, Mr. Winter had been persuaded to try what change would do for him, and had come to this gay and populous place with his wife. Change for him ! he mentally thought—could any "change" heal *his* malady ? Mrs. Winter's sister was sojourning at the same place with her children ; and the little ones sometimes fastened themselves on their uncle. In the old days he would have shaken them off : he bore with them yieldingly and gently now. They had made a stand before the new attraction—seeming to them as to others a very paradise—and he could not get them on.

In the scramble one of the bills got into Mr. Winter's hands ; he list-

lessly cast his eyes over it. It set forth the wonders and seductions of the coming evening's performance: the feats of horsemanship, the tight-rope dancing, the marvellous interludes of the two celebrated clowns. Mr. Mareschino was the "Master of the Ceremonies;" his daughters, Miss Angelica Mareschino, Miss Miranda Mareschino, Miss Bettina Mareschino, were to take large shares in the performance. Involuntarily Mr. Winter wondered which of the three that sweet child might be: he supposed she must be one. Other names followed, ladies and gentlemen; and the "Fairy Sylph" was to appear for the first time. But the bill went for nothing: with that dancing and music before their eyes, that sumptuous attire, than which nothing could be more dazzling, who had leisure to look at bills? The ladies and gentlemen were going through a languid quadrille now, and the spangles glittered and the feathers trembled.

"Uncle Winter! Oh, do, do! The best seats are only two shillings; and children—that's us—half-price. It begins at seven: do bring us!"

Well, why not—if he could give a little pleasure to these eager children? he asked of his weary heart. And he said he would; and bought the tickets there and then.

A high-caste clergyman at a performance of this kind! some might exclaim in condemning astonishment. Well, yes. In the past days, when he was a model of goodness, Mr. Winter had assuredly picked up his black coat-skirt, if within a mile of its contamination; but somehow his views had undergone a change. People, despised before, he felt humble by the side of now. The men and women belonging to this circus might all be miserable sinners; but what was he? They might well be nearer God's saving mercy than he was.

And, behold him in the front row when evening came, the eager children under his wing. It was but a rude place: circuses put up in a night cannot be finished off with crimson cloth and polished brass nails. They sat upon bare boards that did not seem too steady, and Mr. Winter had some doubts of the flaring lights. Mareschino's circus, with all its show and glitter, was not upon the high ropes: before the performance began, its ladies and gentlemen walked in and out amid the spectators, and did not disdain to answer if spoken to: which was condescending.

The clergyman sat, his brow leaning on his hand: it had grown to be a favourite attitude, as if he always felt pain there: glancing on occasionally when forced by the children. The tight-rope dancing was not dangerous; the clowns' jokes were nothing but what all the world might hear; and the riding of the Misses Mareschino, though it did not show perilous skill, had no unpleasant boldness. Applause was hearty; gingerbread and fruit sold fast. A louder burst of admiration than usual caused Mr. Winter to look up.

Riding into the arena on a cream-coloured palfrey speckled with red-brown spots, came a lady who had not yet appeared. She wore a short pink satin skirt finished off at the top with blue; on her head was a golden tiara. Sitting before her, in floating white robes, was the pretty child who had distributed the bills in the day: and the child held on as though she were shy, or frightened. Referring to the bill, Mr. Winter found these two described as Madame Louise and the Fairy Sylph. The fairy sylph looked very much what she was described; but Madame Louise had evidently passed her first youth, and was no longer, to say the least of it, of sylph-like proportions.

Cantering round the arena, the child gradually rose, and stood on the horse, holding, with one hand only, the lady's shoulder. As the pace increased to a gallop, the timidity of the child became more apparent. Mr. Mareschino (supposed to be), parading the centre in a frock coat, blue necktie, grey trousers, and kid gloves, as if he were going to a wedding, seemed to whisper some encouraging words, and cracked the whip he held, not fiercely but gently. Suddenly a large hoop was held before the horse, no doubt for the child to jump through: but the master made a sign and it was carried away again. But for the exceeding beauty of the child, to which all the women's hearts warmed, this part of the performance might have been considered tame.

Then this little girl appeared amid the spectators, distributing bills of the fresh marvels to be seen at the next evening's performance. As she timidly held out one to the clergyman, he took her hand.

"My little maid, do you like this life?"

The fair face flushed sensitively. She glanced round, as if the question bordered on treason.

"Papa's ill, sir."

That the answer conveyed sufficient information, was evident to the child. "Papa!" As the clergyman looked at her, something in her face struck him as not being altogether unfamiliar—it seemed to bear a likeness to some other face he must have known.

"What is your name, my little one?"

"The Fairy Sylph, sir."

"I mean your real name."

"Florence Winter."

The words, given in a whisper, thrilled through every fibre of the clergyman's heart. Never since the death of his own little blossom and the grief it brought, had that name been spoken lightly in his ears. But the child had gone on with her bills, and was lost to his view.

The fine evening had changed to rain; a heavy storm. Some of it came penetrating in places through the canvas roof, to the discomfiture of the admiring spectators.

Hurrying through the wet streets, their heads downwards, the woman

in a worn old cloak, the child bundled up in a ragged shawl, went they. None would have recognized them for Madame Louise and the Fairy Sylph. In place of the gorgeous pink satin and the white floating robes, were poor garments dull and rusty.

Holding the little hand, the woman was speaking in a tone of remonstrance; almost of threats; though the voice was not an unkind one. The child caught up her breath now and again with a sobbing sigh, as if the scolding were deserved; a sound only heard when the heart is charged with heavy grief.

"It's all nonsense, Florence. Fear, fear, fear! It's six weeks, good, now that you have been at close practising, and yet you profess the same fear that you did at the beginning. You want it shaken out of you. How will you do, pray, when you have to ride alone, and go through three hoops of silver paper in each round?"

A passing shiver, an involuntary tightening hold of the protecting hand, proved that the idea was not liked.

"I wonder Mare puts up with you so long. He has been as kind as he could be—just out of favour to me, and the profit I have brought to the Circus in the years gone by. Is it my fault if I'm growing fat? Mare knows it's not. You are a little ungrateful monkey—and, if you don't take the hoop to-morrow, woe betide you."

"If it were anything but riding!" sobbed the child.

"If it were anything but riding!" mimicked the woman. "Of course! that's what every turn-about says—anything but their set work. You are beginning to be cunning early, young madam."

A violent gust, a shower of pelting rain-drops, nearly drove them backwards. Catching hold of the trembling hand more firmly, the woman pressed along, and turned into a poor and close street.

"I'd rather strike myself to the earth than I'd be ungrateful. There's your poor papa lying helpless, and you refuse to aid him! Who is to do it? Goodness knows, Florence, that my will's good to keep you both as I have done, but the unfortunate size I am getting bars it. What it is makes people get fat, I can't imagine," added Madame Louise, going off on her own grievance. "I'm sure I have not eat my fill three parts of the time, so that your papa might have it. I can tell you what, child—he'll be precious soon in his grave if he don't get better. And you hold back from helping him!"

"I'll go through the hoop to-morrow," answered the grieving child.

"Don't cry like that! He'll be wanting to know what has been up. And mind you don't let out about the hoop to *him*; or about the going out in the procession; let him think you just sit on the horse with me, and no more: he has his crotchets, you see. Here we are."

Ascending what seemed to be the common staircase of a lodging-house, the woman opened the door of a room in the roof. On a bed on the floor, lay a man with the bright eyes and wasted cheeks of an in-

valid. A smile parted his feverish lips when he saw the child, and he stretched out one thin hand to her : the other hand was contracted with the remains of rheumatic fever. She threw back her bonnet and darted forwards ; knelt down and buried her face on his breast.

"What has my little Florence got to trouble her?" he fondly asked, feeling the wild throbbing of her heart against his.

"We've been so beat about with the wind and rain, Jack," interposed the woman ; "it quite frightened her."

She began bustling about to prepare supper : cheese and beer for herself, bread and butter for Florence : and stirring up the fire to make some hot gruel for Jack. Florence, in spite of herself, trembled still.

"My little girl does not like the riding," he whispered. "*I* know."

"Oh yes, yes, papa," she eagerly cried, lest her dread and its frightful ingratitude should be betrayed. "It is very nice, and the spangles are beautiful, and Mr. Mare is never rough with *me*."

"*I* know," he repeated in a decisive tone, as if Florence could not deceive him. "It is only for a little while, my darling, please God I get better of this. Say nothing to mother."

The young face was lifted in brightness. "Only for a little while!" A promise that brought to her she knew not what of rapture.

"I will do my best until then, papa, and go through the—go through the riding," said she, the forbidden word "hoop" having all but slipped out in her eagerness. "Mother will take care of me till you get well, papa."

"Papa" and "mother." They sounded odd in conjunction with each other. The mother turned round at the moment from the fire, and the saucepan she was stirring.

"I've got a drain of brandy for you to-night, and I shall put it in, Jack. May be it will send you into a perspiration."

Drums, and trumpets, and lights, and feathers, and spangles ! The evening performance had recommenced, with all its noise and glitter, and Mr. Mareschino had the gratification of seeing an overflowing audience.

In the very spot where he was the previous night, but alone this time, sat Mr. Winter. Surely it might have been deemed strange that a disreputable travelling circus (as many clergymen would not have hesitated to style it), should be so attracting him !

Never since it was spoken had he got the name, Florence Winter, out of his thoughts ; never had he got the child. He had begun to fancy that the resemblance he saw in her face to some face of the past, was to Jack. To Jack ! Almost he felt persuaded that this child might be his brother's. Jack had once said in his joking way, when nursing his (the clergyman's) fading infant, that if ever he bought a girl-baby of his own, he should name it Florence. The child had talked of "papa." Mr. Winter supposed it might be a step-father. if indeed her

true father had been his brother. A thousand doubts kept suggesting themselves to him. Had the child had a legal mother?—Jack was not a likely man to marry. No matter. His ideas on many points were reversed. Time was, when he would have been content to turn his exemplary clerical back on Mareschino's Circus, child and all, as an ill-doing lot with whom he could not put himself in contact; but that was over.

The name haunted him. The likeness haunted him. The one had certainly been spoken; about the other he did not feel so sure. Placing himself in the way when the grand procession went round the town at midday, he sought to take a good, long look, and see whether the likeness was fact or fiction. But the elbowing crowds, assembled in numbers, jostled the clergyman roughly, as if asking what *he* did there; and he never caught one glimpse of the sweet face.

And here he was, at the evening performance, his mind in a kind of fever. If this was really Jack's child, it would be something to rescue and cherish it. Not any atonement for the past; that could never be; but a great duty that he might not go from. In due time Madame Louise and the child came in on the spotted palfrey. Each time they passed him in going round the arena, he sought to trace the likeness. But the pace was swift; the glances he obtained were transitory.

Three times was the hoop held before the standing child. Each time she seemed as if about to make a spring, and did not. Madame Louise seemed to say some sharp words; Mr. Mareschino cracked his whip loudly; and the fourth time she took the spring. It was a signal failure. The child threw the hoop down, and fell herself; not to the ground, for Madame Louise's stout but skilled arms contrived to catch her. That lady looked dark with anger, and the poor child burst into tears. Dropping her gently down, Madame Louise, by way of covering the defeat, put forth her mettle, took one or two daring leaps herself, and rode like mad. The good-natured spectators cheered to the roof.

The child, overcome with humiliation, was silently making her escape, when she found herself caught hold of by the clergyman. She turned up her little tear-stained face.

"Don't cry," he soothingly said. "You are not hurt.

"It is for papa," she answered. "I shall never be able to do it. Mother is so angry."

"Is that your mother?" pointing to the flying pink saïin.

"Yes; she is papa's wife.

He saw the likeness now: it lay in the soft brown eyes. "My dear, will you tell me what your papa's name is?"

"Winter."

"And his other name?"

"Jack."

Mr. Winter did not know whether a spasm struck his heart; but it

seemed to stand suddenly still. Could it be—*could* it be, that Jack was yet in life?—that the sad history disclosed of the death in Lambeth related to another? Before he could speak again, the child was gone.

It was a fine evening. As Madame Louise and the Fairy Sylph were walking homewards in their dull costume, not many degrees removed from tatters, the former's tongue waging hot war on the delinquent, she found herself accosted by a gentleman in the garb of the Church of England. He fancied he knew her husband, he said: would she allow him to accompany them home, and see him?

The question took Madame Louise aback. But the speaker reassured her, and they all walked on together. The woman told how helpless her husband had been for months and months; which was the reason of the girl's being put to the circus.

"She can't bear it, sir; says she's frightened. It's very ungrateful of her, for she knows as well as I do the state her papa is in: she has got the sense and thought of one double her age. He don't like it for her, neither—but what will you?—we must live. Once let her get to ride fearlessly, and she'd be the chief attraction of the troupe: folks take to her looks, you see, sir. The Mares pay us well, for I am his sister."

"Whose sister?" asked Mr. Winter, a little at sea.

"Mare's sister. Mareschino is only the professional name—as I dare say you'd guess. My name was Louisa Mare. The eldest daughter was called after me; but the name would clash with mine in the bills, and so they put it Angelica. The second girl is Maria, and the other Betsey. They are converted for the public into Miranda and Bettina."

"Do you know why this 'child was christened Florence?" asked the clergyman in a low tone.

"No, sir. I was only married to her father three years ago."

"Papa has told me I had a little cousin, named Florence once; he was very fond of her, and she died," spoke up the listening child.

Higher and higher grew his hope. When they got up stairs and into the room, the invalid was lying as usual on the low bed, nearly in darkness. Madame Louise lighted a candle, and held it (intending to be hospitable) so that the flame shone on either face: on the one looking doubtfully down, on the other looking wonderingly up.

"Is it you, Septimus?"

The words set doubt at rest. With a great gasp, a sob of delirious joy, Septimus Winter fell beside the bed, and clasped poor Jack in his arms as he had never done since the lad's boyhood.

"Oh, Jack, my brother, forgive me!"

Jack was too weak to betray much emotion, but the tears shone in his great brown eyes, the slender fingers of his one able hand entwined themselves within those of his brother. No wonder Mr. Winter had failed at first to recognize him; he was fearfully changed.

"Don't ask about it," he said almost passionately, when the clergy-

man would have questioned him of his past life. "There has not been much good in it to tell about. I went to the bad after I left you, and felt ashamed to let anybody know where I was. My marriage brought me up for a time; she was a lady, mind, Septimus; a world too good for me, and had some money. We lived in Italy; Florence was born there, and when she was two years old her mother died. What little money was left, I soon got through. I came back to England; and was about as bad as a man can be."

"And—she—is your second wife?" whispered Septimus, glancing at Madame Louise, who was on her knees coaxing up the fire.

"Yes. I fell in with Mareschino's circus. Mare and I grew intimate, and his sister Louisa married me. It was no bargain for her: though you, remembering social prejudices, would say, I suppose, it was none for me. She is an honest woman, Septimus: there are such in a circus troupe as well as out of it: she has been a good wife to me and cared for Florence. Rheumatic fever set in a year ago, and here I am—dying before I'm middle-aged."

"Not dying, Jack, I trust; if skill and care can restore you."

"Well, sometimes I have hope. Chiefly when I think of Florence. Any way, God has been good to me; for He has shown me my sin. The sin of a wasted life."

Good to both of them; good to both of them. As the clergyman parted with Jack and went home in the moonlight, his heart overflowing with its sense of the mercy the night had brought him, he wondered how he could ever hope to be sufficiently thankful.

But Jack was to die. Love and skill were exerted, but they did not save him. In a pretty cottage of his native village, where he had wished to go, death came to him calmly and peaceably. Septimus and his wife were there; and the child was solemnly given over to them.

"You'll do better by her than I ever should;" said Jack, his grateful eyes, growing dim now, fixed on them. "She'll be happier with you than she could have been with me."

"If love can make her so," murmured Septimus Winter's wife.

"And I know that she will have that," spoke Madame Louise. "I'd have done my best by her; but a poor best it would be."

"If you could but be persuaded to live in comfort as Jack's widow—in this cottage, for instance," suggested Mrs. Winter, anxiously.

"Ah, but I can't; thank you all the same. I must stick by the old concern as long as it will stick by me; I'd not be happy out of it. I can ride for some years yet; and I fancy my calves are a trifle smaller. The Mares will be glad to have me live with them, as I did before I married."

"If it must be," sighed Mrs. Winter, thinking of the frightful discom-

fort of such a life. "Have no fears on the score of Florence. She will be to us as a dear child."

"I may come to see her sometimes?—once in a year, or so?" pleaded Madame Louise. "I know I am only a poor circus-rider, and she is—altogether different."

"Come! Yes," warmly responded the clergyman, his chest heaving with emotion. "Difference? Shall we not be all alike in Heaven!"



FAIRY FACES.

OUT of the mists of childhood,
Steeped in a golden glory,
Come dreamy forms and faces,
Snatches of song and story;
Whispers of sweet, still voices;
Rays of ethereal glimmer,
That gleam like sunny heavens,
Ne'er grow colder or dimmer:
Now far in the distance, now shining near,
Lighting the snows of the shivering year.

Faces there are that tremble,
Bleared with a silent weeping;
Weird in a shadowy sorrow,
As if endless vigil keeping;
Faces of dazzling brightness,
With childlike radiance lighted;
Flashing with many a beauty
Nor time nor care had blighted:
But over them all there's a glamour thrown—
Bright with the dreamy distance alone.

A glow in the Christmas halo,
Shining with heavenly lustre,
These are the fairy faces
That round the hearthstone cluster;
These the deep, tender records,
Sacred in all their meetness,
That, wakening purest fancies,
Softens us with their sweetness;
As gathered where flickering faggots burn—
We welcome the holy season's return.

WILLIAM DUTHIE.

